

CENTERING:
A COLLABORATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF
THE HILLCREEK POTTERY AT SILVER DOLLAR CITY

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ABSTRACT
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Under the direction of Professor Glenn Hinson

This thesis explores the disparate yet complementary roles filled by potters at Silver Dollar City (SDC), an 1880s Ozarks theme park in Branson, Missouri. As apprentices, the potters learn a spectrum of skills, kinesthetic through aesthetic. As production potters, they maintain a high output of sellable wares. The potters balance the constraints they see in production (its threats to creativity, individuality, and dialogue with other ceramicists) by claiming the freedoms of studio potters (who value these goals). The potters' ability to demonstrate at the park and participate in its 1880s-Ozarks heritage production sets the SDC potters apart. Understanding how the potters balance or, as potters do, find the center amongst these roles shows the uniqueness of their work. Daily contact with the potters as an apprentice informed my interviews. Following a collaborative ethnographic model, my consultants critiqued my developing understanding of their work from my early research through final drafts.

PREFACE

In 1983, my parents and I—a girl, age six—made our first visit to Silver Dollar City (SDC), an 1880s Ozarks-theme park on the outskirts of the famed tourism capital of Branson, Missouri. We fell in love with the theme park’s vaudeville-style hillbilly characters, history-telling amusement rides, and old-time “crafts-in-action.” In fact, we have been back most years since. In 2002, I fulfilled a childhood dream by starting the life-long task of learning to make pots and by going to work at Silver Dollar City that summer and the next as a very-beginner apprentice potter and crafts demonstrator. I planned to make the experience the center of my Folklore master’s thesis and embarked on a close study of the pottery shop and what it means—not to the kids eager to watch the demonstrations, but to the potters who work there.

With that single goal in mind, I wanted to let the project unfold by holding to a new approach I have been exploring: collaborative ethnography. Ethnographies focus on a uniquely situated group, but this kind of close study often illustrates the greater traditions at work. The vision of collaborative ethnography shaped by folklorist Glenn Hinson and his students at UNC-CH, including Eric Lassiter (2000), follows in the tradition of dialogic ethnography in that it highlights the ethnographer’s process by narrating how experiences and conversations with consultants shaped the researcher’s own analysis. Yet collaborative ethnography goes further to bridge the divide between the ethnographer and those she studies, because it privileges

the relationship and dialogue with these consultants over that with the academy. Towards this goal, consultants participate in all stages of the ethnographic process, including decisions about how and for what purpose the ethnographer will share her learning with outsiders. The ethnographer grounds the work in consultant concerns. Thus working collaboratively meant letting the potters guide me towards what most needed telling.

My apprenticeship would allow me to build strong relationships with my consultants and would give us a common body of experience from which to draw when discussing the complex issues their work poses. Time set aside for more formal, recorded conversation would be the crux of the work. As an aid toward ethnography, many scholars have found that entering into an apprenticeship with those they study provides invaluable personal experience (Coy 1989). My ability to enter into an apprenticeship, try my hand at the work, and realize the day-to-day issues my consultants face informed the questions I brought to our formal conversations. The SDC potters, other park craftsmen, retail staff, and managers all provided insights that steered my project in key ways. This multi-voiced text should clearly signal my indebtedness to them.

That said, I did begin the project with my own understanding of the park and its pottery, and had well-developed expectations about what I would discover and about how my thesis might fit in with current debates among folklorists and other scholars close to my field of study. While all I learned about the potters and, thus, the ultimate direction of my project surprised me, recollecting that earlier understanding and retracing some of my expectations will serve as a useful preface.

To touch on those framing assumptions, I begin by offering a fuller picture of the pottery's larger context: Branson and Silver Dollar City. Then I share some of the disciplinary questions a setting like this one elucidates for folklorists before honing in on this thesis's narrow task.

The Branson area, the often-claimed "heart of the Ozarks," has welcomed tourists for over a century. Many flocked to the Ozark Mountain region to enjoy its nature—caves, hills, hollers, creeks, rivers, and later three man-made lakes. Phenomenon like the national best-selling novel *Shepherd of the Hills*, published in 1907, gave the Ozarks fame as a preserve of old-time ways. After the book's success, many traveled to the region to rediscover for themselves what the story promised, an American Arcadia not yet corrupted by modern times (Morrow and Myers-Phinney 1999). Still today, many of the Branson area's tourist attractions find humor in playing off the region's infamous backwoods identity: hillbillies and moonshine.

Within the landscape of these well-storied mountains, a family built a hillbilly-inspired theme park. According to the published Silver Dollar City park history (Payton 1997), during the late 1940s, the park's founders, Hugo and Mary Herschend from Chicago, started making visits to the Ozarks to enjoy the wildflowers. Hugo Herschend was a first generation Danish immigrant born to a wealthy family but, as he was not the first born son, received no inheritance. He left Denmark at the age of 19 to travel the world and eventually ended up in Chicago, where he studied at the LaSalle School of Engineering and became a district manager for the Electrolux Corporation. Mary Herschend grew up on a farm in

Illinois and studied there at Eureka College and then at Ohio State University. In 1950, after numerous trips to the Ozarks, this entrepreneurial pair with their two sons decided to stay in Branson and join the tourism business themselves, leasing and setting out adventurously to manage Marvel Cave, America's third largest cavern, located just outside Branson. The cave had been a tourist site since the 1880s. The Herschends promoted their newly acquired attraction by winning additional press for well-advertised square dance events held inside the cave's stunning, six-story tall Cathedral Room. They made improvements (poured concrete stairwells, and blasted out a tunnel to lift guests out by train) to increase the cave's visitor capacity and appeal. Then to complement this attraction, the Herschends and their original staff of sixteen built a fictional "Ozark Mountain Village" near the cave entrance. They named their creation Silver Dollar City. At its grand opening in 1960, the park boasted a stage coach ride, a general store, the Wilderness Church, an ice cream parlor, five shops, and a street troupe that played out the Hatfield/McCoy rivalry on the square several times each day. Meanwhile, the first of Branson's shows had their start: Ozark Mountain Jubilee, the Baldknobbers Hillbilly Jamboree, and the first staging of *Shepherd of the Hills*.

Silver Dollar City and Branson have seen astonishing expansion since that time. During the 1990s, presses across the nation mused over what they termed the "Branson Boom." The thirty-plus theaters that line Branson's famed Highway 76-strip, "Country Boulevard" (including venues owned by Mickey Gilley, Mel Tillis, Shoji Tabuchi, Yakov Smirnoff, the Osmond Family, and Andy Williams), now have a total theatrical seating capacity surpassing that of Broadway. Hotel rooms outnumber the

city's resident population several times over. Seven million visit Branson each year; two million of them, predominately white families with children, visit Silver Dollar City. Guests to Silver Dollar City still visit its general store and tour its majestic cave, yet today the site features all the trappings of a modern theme park: old and new rides (the newest reflecting the latest trends in roller coasters), full scale indoor and outdoor musical and theatrical productions, and numerous themed concessions and merchandise shops.

Now a family-owned corporation, the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation owns and operates not only its original attraction (Marvel Cave, now Silver Dollar City), but also several other properties in the area. These include a second theme park, Celebration City; a water park, White Water; a showboat that goes out twice each day on Table Rock Lake, Showboat Branson Belle; a dinner theater spectacular, Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede (which the corporation co-owns); a campground with SDC hand-hewn log cabins, The Wilderness; and a hybrid bus/boat tour, Ride the Ducks. Outside Branson, they manage Stone Mountain Park in Atlanta, Georgia, where they built an 1870s-theme park called Crossroads modeled after the successes at SDC. In Pigeon Forge, TN, they co-own Dollywood, a park developed out of a second Silver Dollar City constructed there in the 1980s. Today, Herschend Family Entertainment is a leader in its industry. In 2005, the company hosted the annual meeting of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions in Branson. Attending members visited several of the Herschends' Ozark Mountain Properties, including Silver Dollar City, during their weekend stay.

The setting of the project alone would pique a folklorist's interest. Here a major theme park corporation—though one with quite humble beginnings—maintains its own “heritage production.” Silver Dollar City fits many of the characteristics of what scholars have termed “heritage productions” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Through these productions, individuals working as curators select and then re-present and “interpret” locales, artifacts, and traditions of a culture to outsiders. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines “heritage” as a “new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (7). Many cultural specialists have taken an interest in how heritage productions of all types—from non-profit heritage farms and national historic sites to those by Anheuser-Bush and Disney—have depicted historic communities and traditions (Anderson 1991, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Davis 1997). These scholars often show more interest in what these storytelling productions leave out and why, rather than what they actually tell. I kept their questions in mind throughout my study at SDC (a venue scholars have largely overlooked) and took for myself a far narrower focus: pottery production at the park. Since Silver Dollar City's first years, craft demonstrations have been central to how SDC functions as a heritage production; the park even bills itself as the “Home of American Craftsmanship.” Today guests see demonstrations by blacksmiths, glassblowers, basket makers, candle makers, cut glass artists, quilters, woodworkers, woodcarvers, potters, and others.

An ethnography of the pottery appealed to me because it meant uncovering the communicative divide between the park's storyline and its behind-the-scenes reality. The storyline invites SDC guests to recall an 1880s Ozark town's

independent pottery. If we were to extrapolate from Charles Zug's study of early potteries in North Carolina (1986), this imagined 1880s family-owned-and-operated pottery in the Ozarks would have offered functional wares made with local clays and utilized technology of the time like a ground hog kiln and salt glazes. During that time period, independent potteries sold pots to the local community off their back lot and to distant communities by way of wagon. Yet the reality of the park means that visitors meet modern ceramicists who work each day to improve their craft and expand their artistic vision, while they also maintain production goals and participate in the theme park's heritage production. The pottery actually does little to recreate a historically accurate pottery. In this contemporary pottery, both men and women make pots, and the pot designs fit current tastes. The potters participate in the park's heritage production principally through their costuming and their shop's decor. Evocation of the past, rather than authenticity, is the guiding principal of the park. Even though my first questions about the SDC pottery focused on the park's approach as a heritage production, my dedication to telling the story of the pottery from the potters' perspective took my project in new directions. For the potters, their participation in SDC's heritage production represents just one part of their work at the park.

For two summers, I worked side by side with the SDC potters as their apprentice and ethnographer. Through my close collaboration with them, I am able to share important essences of their experience; here, I sketch out the world of meaning they find in their pot-making performances. Yet before I share their story, let me first walk you into the park, offering you the perspective that prompted my

fascination with the SDC potters. My interest began as a child visiting the park and enjoying the potters' performances from the outside looking in. To know more about my memories traveling to Branson and visiting Silver Dollar City and its pottery will help you appreciate how much more I learned when I stepped inside.

To me as a child, Branson itself exists within a beautiful wilderness. My family and I drive up each summer from Dallas,



Illustration 1: The author (on the left end of the first row) before one of her early trips down into Silver Dollar City's Marble Cave.

Texas, and see the landscape change completely as we drive into the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and then of Missouri. As we climb twisting mountain roads, a vista above the trees suddenly opens up. We see glassy creeks winding through green in the valley below. My family started making these visits when my grandparents moved to Forsyth, just outside Branson. While at Grandma and Grandpa's house, we tool around their small town, spend several evenings at the local swimming hole on Swan Creek, and take a family canoe trip—all real treats for city kids. We also get up early several days during the week and drive out to Silver Dollar City.

We bypass the glitz of Branson's main drag and take the long back road out to the City. As we approach, traffic slows to a stop. Lined up outside the park on a

winding two-lane road among tall trees, I look up and see a billboard with a picture of the Silver Dollar City sheriff smiling down at us with his deep blue starched shirt, black leather vest, silver star badge, and black felt Stetson. He assures us we're almost there, pointing towards our destination. The sign reads, "1880s Ahead. You've got a great past ahead of you." I can't wait!

I have been to the City many times before. Those frequent summer visits keep my memory of the place fresh. Throughout the year, I play back my memories of those women in long dresses and men in beards who hustle and bustle around the City's square. Anytime I want to think about old times, I remember what I experienced at SDC. I love to go back and revisit all my favorite spots, dragging my parents along for the tour.

As we hurry through the main gate and step out onto the square, the sheriff comes to greet us. He gathers a group of arriving kids around him, crouches down on one knee, and gives us each a silver star to wear just like his. He says, "Now, I'm going to deputize you, but you've got to promise to uphold the law." "Yes, sir!" we say, and then we're off, ready to explore every corner of the city.

A trip to the pottery always makes it to the top of my to-do list. I'll show you the way: from the main square, facing the general store and the ice cream parlor, take the path to your right through the billows of smoke drifting away from Shad's Blacksmith Shop. Head past Brown's Candy Factory—don't let the smell of peanut brittle lure you in. Then step over the wooden bridge where you'll hear the sound of horses tromping across with you, or bounce along the swinging footbridge that begins around the corner of the bakery to take you over the creek. Walk past the

woodcarver, “The Flooded Mine,” and cross over the train tracks after the Frisco moves through. Step inside with me into Hillcreek Pottery. We have arrived at our destination.

It’s cool inside, and you hear the sound of ceramic wind chimes tinkling from the rafters. Colorful kitchen pots fill the room—bowls, plates, casseroles, canister sets, spoon jars—all displayed on household furniture—a kitchen table, a tall cabinet, an old stove. A woman in a long flower-print dress, apron, and lacy cap comes over to greet us with, “How y’all doin’?” There’s a huge mug



Illustration 2: The shop’s mug tree

tree that attracts your eye. Its four-sided structure stands eight feet tall with mugs of every shape and size hanging from several hundred wooden pegs. You spend a long time there just picking up each mug to see which one fits your hand best, looking carefully to find one with just the right mix of colors and just the right shape to please you.

In the demonstration area, the potter has come out to work. A standing crowd of ten gathers. The potter wears a blue shirt, sleeves rolled up past the elbows, and a bibbed apron that splits into canvas chaps and drapes over both legs as he sits and straddles the wheel. He has tied his long gray hair back and covered his head

with a bandana. His beard has grown long too, but it does not seem to interfere with his work. The potter lifts up one of the neat balls of clay he has prepared, throws it down on the wheel where it sticks, and gives the flywheel a few strong kicks with his right leg. With his left leg, he presses down on a lever below to allow a motor to start. Hear the clanging sound as it picks up the work sustaining the heavy flywheel's motion. The potter submerges a sponge in a large bowl of fresh water, lifts it out to dribble over the spinning ball of clay, and begins to work. Under the pressure of his slow and steady movements, the uneven lump of clay transforms quickly into a fully symmetrical mound. He makes a divot with his thumb to mark the middle, continues to press down through the center to leave only a thin layer of clay at the bottom, and then pulls the rest of the clay out to create the correct bottom width of the piece. With his next move, we see the low thick wall of the vessel quickly begin to thin and rise up. He lifts the sponge out of the water bowl again and squeezes more water to run across the pot's new surfaces. With one hand inside and one outside, he squeezes the side between his two index fingers (buttressed by his thumbs), thinning the wall bottom to top in a long, slow rising movement; the piece grows taller. In three moves like this, what he calls three "pulls," he has worked the clay up into a perfect cylinder ready for nuance.

I push to the front of the crowd gathered to watch, all the way up to the little white fence that marks the potter's work area. I could watch him work for a good while, maybe stay to see him make three or four pieces until Mom and Dad are ready to move on. The potter talks to us while he works, explaining the steps. You ask questions. He might make a joke (maybe one aimed at you) or extend a hand to

see if you'll accept his muddy handshake. I always want him to mess up, because when he does, when that nearly finished pot, tall and elegant buckles and twists in on itself, he will hold a wire taut to cut it off the wheel, quickly lump the wet clay together, and throw it to stick on the side wall or ceiling to dry. Then he will wink at me and begin again. As I watch him work, I quickly identify the form—a cylinder, a bowl, or a plate—but he always sees ways to refine the piece that surprise me, coming back in with a sponge, a tool, or a wet finger to reshape the rim, add a line, or to change the curve subtly.

Standing close to the fence to watch the potter move clay in such astonishing ways prompts a little girl's dream: if it could just be me on the other side someday, dressed in overalls and making pots in front of other kids who ooh-and-ah.

This thesis gave me my chance.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Some pots leave SDC as souvenirs of a day at the park spent lining up for roller coasters and funnel cakes. Others become artifacts of a trip made back in time, a day at the park recollecting old-time crafts and small town friendliness. Some pots bear the mark of the potter who gave the awe-inspiring demonstration. Some others perfectly match Mom's kitchen countertop. Some will cheer up morning coffee. Others go to a friend. Another bunch came from the "seconds" shelf. Some just couldn't be put down. SDC pots find all kinds of uses and mean many different things to their many new owners. But that story will keep for another time. Here we consider the maker's vision.

My research follows a methodology outlined by material culture specialists, specialists who call scholars to understand craft and craft-making by sorting out the multiple contexts that give handwork meaning by taking care to present individuals (not just groups or nameless informants) and by including aesthetic analysis. Scholars can understand pottery making in many ways, but they must keep in mind that pottery making is a form of art, and it should be studied as such (Barta 2003, Glassie 1999a). The fullest picture of the SDC pottery would explore the contexts of creation, communication, and consumption (the last illuminating the moment those

many pots leave the park) (Barta 2003). By maintaining the perspective of potters, I learn the most about the first of these domains: the context of creation.

During my first month of apprenticeship and ethnographic study, I learned about the SDC pottery's unique situation, much more than I could have fathomed



Illustration 3: The gallery space (above) and the private downstairs workshop (below)

knowing as a kid visiting the park. First, the potters still do the demonstrations I enjoyed back then. When they do demonstrate, they do so without direct training from the park, and instead, observe and learn from other demonstrators. They join a long tradition of SDC craft demonstration shaped by the numerous potters and craftsmen who have performed

their work at the park. Notably, each potter's production only happens on the demonstration wheel (one hour in the morning and one and a half hours in the

afternoon). Finish work (often more time consuming than throwing) happens in the downstairs workshop, away from guests, throughout the remainder of the day.

The potters make pots how they like—mostly. Each potter designs and crafts each piece; in so doing, each works like a “studio potter,” assuming a distinct identity within the greater community of ceramicists (and one juxtaposed to “production potters”). The SDC potters share an understanding about what this identity means for how they work and what they make. Studio potters see themselves as part of an artistic community that shares ideas through university ceramics programs, arts and crafts shows, galleries, trade magazines, books, conferences, and workshops; SDC potters have participated in all these activities. When focused on their goals as studio potters, the potters at SDC do not think much about making 1880s Ozark pots.

During the park’s early years, the pottery shop operated off of front-gate ticket sales, offered demonstrations, and sold some old-time-inspired shapes like crocks, jugs, and churns; at that time, retail sales were a secondary goal. Today, those true-to-theme shapes come and go as customer tastes dictate, because the corporate managers now look to the pottery to create revenue for the park by offering a full range of functional pots in styles that sell. The shop offers many lower-priced pieces styled for quick production to accommodate customers who have already paid a significant entry fee to enter the park. Potters freely repeat some of their designs to quickly increase the shop’s output, an approach shared by other production-minded potteries.

Many potters come to SDC because they seek an apprenticeship. Potters with limited experience come to the park, join in the production for a wage, and apprentice to accomplished potters to learn the craft and business.

Throughout my two summers and numerous conversations with the potters and their retail staff and managers, I learned about many aspects of the potters' work at SDC. We discussed issues that ranged from what newcomers to the shop hope to accomplish as apprentices, to what makes a studio potter's work distinct, to how the pottery's place within a theme park and a corporation changes how it functions. From all I learned, my analysis focuses on the potters' ability to join in the dynamism of clay work today within the park's unique environment. I propose that while the theme park's storyline playfully recalls the lifeways of an 1880s Ozark town and costumed craftsmen demonstrate as part of that staging, the potters at Silver Dollar City concentrate their real efforts on creating pots that not only appeal to their park customers and meet their high demand, but also make a unique artistic contribution to the development of ceramics at large. Through their pots, the SDC potters contribute to the ongoing dialogue (visual and verbal) among studio potters, identifying themselves with a community that is loosely linked, but global in its range. Through aesthetic negotiation between the potters' own tastes and those of their customers, and through their daily conversations with guests across the demonstration wheel, the potters help outsiders understand more about the potters' own perspective. While affirming their identity as studio potters, the SDC potters also reach out to a clientele of outsiders (the park's many guests who may not readily understand or appreciate the potters' skills and aesthetics). The negotiation

of studio versus production identities is only part of the broader creative and experiential context. For the novice potter, the high level of production makes the shop an excellent place for apprenticeship and for creative exploration of forms, designs, and processes. A subset of craftsmen find the staging of pottery the most appealing offering of the park because they see the power of sharing traditional craft knowledge to make people feel connected with one another and in touch with their heritage.

In our conversations, I noticed that the SDC potters trace out their identity in patterned ways, speaking at times of their work as “apprentices,” “production potters,” “studio potters,” and as “crafts demonstrators.” Potters inside and outside SDC share in common the first three roles; the last, crafts demonstrator, makes the SDC potters special. To best understand the potters’ work at the park, I found it useful to focus one at a time on these four contexts; each brings different and often disparate objectives to the foreground, goals the potters must ultimately juggle. The chapters show how the potters fill these multiple roles and how, in doing so, they balance or—to use a pottery metaphor—center modes of work that both oppose and support one another.

The thesis begins with the chapter “Apprentice” because the opportunity to apprentice initially draws many potters to the shop at SDC, and because apprenticeship begins every potter’s career. The chapter illustrates how the SDC potters understand apprenticeship and details their expansive view of mentorship and of how and what they learn. For potters both inside and outside of SDC, apprenticeship functions as a rite of passage and as a preparation for many kinds of

ceramic work. The section ends with the idea of apprenticeship as a cumulative progression of learning, one that may not end when the potter stops identifying him or herself by the title.

“Production Potter” details how the shop meets two goals important to production potters: maintaining a high level of production and satisfying the demand and tastes of their client base. In meeting these goals, the potters experience many positive outcomes. A high level of production builds the potter’s skill and efficiency and takes the focus off of any one pot and puts it on the success of one’s process. Conversely, the potters also see the negative affects of production on other goals important to them: creativity, individuality, and a dialogue with the ceramics community at large. The potters lessen the negative impacts of production and better enjoy its benefits by balancing their role as production potters with that as studio potters.

“Studio Potter” tells how the SDC potters strive to develop work that shows engagement with the greater ceramics community. The SDC potters find themselves linked with potters outside the shop through a variety of media, off and online communities, and conferences. Because of this network, potters can share an identity and specialized knowledge with other self-described studio potters. This allows them to better evaluate and appreciate each other’s work. This chapter shows how the SDC potters negotiate between their roles as both production and studio potters. To do so, they find compromises between their own aesthetics and those of their customers. While insiders to studio pottery best understand the work

of other studio artists, the SDC potters find opportunities to explain their work to outsiders when they talk with guests from behind the demonstration wheel.

“Crafts Demonstrator” discusses how the constancy of demonstration allows the potters to meet several goals. The demo allows them to interact with customers and share their expertise; ultimately, this dialogue helps the potters sell their pots. At the same time, the crafts demonstrations involve the potters in the park’s 1880s Ozarks heritage production through their costuming, shop design, production methods, and the pots themselves. For some craftsmen, the ability to share their artistry with guests was their principal reason for joining the park staff. This group believes that, whilst the modern world seems to loosen the ties that hold families and communities together, sharing handcraft traditions with others helps all involved find and reclaim their roots. The chapter also discusses some of the nuts-and-bolts of demonstration. Skilled demonstrators of the past have helped establish a viable tradition of crafts demonstration at the park that exhibits common patterns and follows a set of unspoken rules. The demonstrators typically take on a humorous and friendly character at the wheel, maybe even one a bit “country.” While so doing, they often describe their immediate work at the wheel and share details about the other technical processes required; additionally, they take time for open conversation with guests, which allows demonstration to help meet the goals of other roles.

Each role presents a different perspective on the part of the potters. Each also highlights a different set of goals. Exploring the ways that SDC potters negotiate between these roles best illuminates their experience.

Chapter II

APPRENTICE

I treat this job at this shop very much as an apprenticeship, and I mean, Bryan Keeland is a gold mine for me. I want to know everything that he knows about pottery. I want to pick up every trick that everyone knows that I don't know. I am very, very focused on that. (Kingsbury 2003a)

Zoë Kingsbury joined the shop during my second summer. She had already worked four years in clay, splitting her time between the ceramics room and the theater at universities in Minnesota and Iowa. She came to the shop with a foundation of ceramic skills, an eagerness to build them, and a quick wit and spunk that made her an entertaining crafts demonstrator and a lively presence in our workshop. Kingsbury talked with me at length about the importance of her experience at the pottery shop to her development as a potter. She wanted an apprenticeship, and in her boss Bryan Keeland, she found the mentor she needed. In fact, all of the potters with whom I worked during my two summers at the shop cited apprenticeship as a central motivation to go to work for SDC.



Illustration 4: Zoë Kingsbury

Through my conversations with the potters, I began to understand more fully what apprenticeship means to them. This chapter will share their understandings, beginning with an introduction of those whom they identify as teachers, followed by a description of the many ways they learn, and by a breakdown of the varied skills they seek to acquire. Next, I will discuss how the potters view the apprenticeship experience as a rite of passage within their profession and as an experience that prepares them for many kinds of ceramic work. The chapter concludes by presenting apprenticeship as a cumulative progression of learning.

When discussing their apprenticeships, SDC potters credit many potters as their teachers. They look first to a central mentor, the most experienced potter in the shop—their boss, Bryan Keeland. They also anticipate learning from their peers in the shop, as well as from potters far outside their immediate apprenticeship setting.

Meet apprentice Bryan Lynch. Lynch began his apprenticeship at SDC just a few months before I did and stayed on three years at the shop. His experience at SDC marked his third apprenticeship to an experienced ceramicist. Lynch became interested in clay during high school and set out to learn more about the ceramics community in and around his home city of Springfield, Missouri (just an hour north of Branson). With this goal in mind, he apprenticed first to a sculptor and later to a studio potter, Mitch Yung (to whom he has since returned). He then entered the ceramics program at Southwest Missouri State. Over the years, Lynch learned about many local potters who had apprenticed at SDC. After graduating, Lynch worked a year for L&R Specialties, the ceramics supply in Nixa, Missouri (which

serves many of the state's potteries, including SDC). Then when a position opened up at the City, he applied.

For Lynch, SDC offered an apprenticeship to an experienced potter in a "traditional-type setting," a pottery producing a high volume of wares so the lead potter turns much of the work over to apprentices. To him, SDC provided the kind of pottery setting Soetsu Yanagi, Bernard Leach, and Shoji Hamada wanted to reclaim for art potters as they led the revivalist and influential Mingei movement in Japan beginning after World War I. These scholars saw how apprenticeship in a pottery



Illustration 5: Bryan Lynch

dedicated to producing traditional functional wares could best fuel a potter's art by allowing the apprentice to build the skills fundamental to the craft, while mastering traditional forms they believed to be timelessly beautiful. As John Singleton (1989) observed in modern-day Mingei movement-inspired potteries in Japan, apprentices move through various stages of apprenticeship. They begin with a period of "unobtrusive observation," helping out with side tasks at the shop while observing

the master at work. They then begin a period of first trials at the wheel while the master takes tea. Later they fulfill prescribed practice, working to consistently throw a single form. When they master the form, they begin producing precise pieces for sale. As their skills grow, apprentices participate more fully in the shop's production. After they have reached a point of relative mastery, apprentices continue to work for an additional period as payment for the apprenticeship.

Noting the similarities to Mingei-movement-inspired shops, Bryan Lynch discussed how he could learn at SDC through the experience of the day-to-day work, while working for an experienced potter who would serve as motivator, quality controller, and teacher. Instead of trying to figure out everything on his own, he could learn the tricks his boss had developed through a decade of experience. In this way, Lynch's mentor at SDC could help him "leap" forward his skills (Lynch 2002a). For Lynch and the other apprentices at the shop, SDC gives potters-in-training an opportunity to work closely with an experienced potter who will model his technical and creative process and offer explanation and critique to his apprentices as they join in the work.

Lead potter Bryan Keeland fully embraced this teaching role and felt he could offer what his apprentices could not find in their university ceramics programs: proximity. He believed he could best guide apprentices by working side-by-side with them, allowing him to keep a close watch on their progress in the shop and to offer appropriate critique and advice when merited. He said this of university ceramics faculty:

You know some of them just say, "Here's the wheel. Here's the clay. I'll be in my office. Don't bother me," that type of thing. If you are

going to teach students these technical skills, you've got to be right there next to them on the wheel so you can see when they do something wrong and tell them, "Okay, you need to change what you are doing here, and that will make your pots better." (Keeland 2004)

Keeland's description of his teaching role as one strengthened by proximity to his apprentices helps clarify why the SDC potters quickly acknowledge each other as teachers, too.

During a typical summer at SDC, the shop employs five or six potters. They take turns demonstrating at the wheel upstairs in the themed gallery space open to the public, but spend the rest of their day together in the un-themed private workspace downstairs. There they do finish work on pieces thrown the previous day: trimming the bottoms of pie plates; attaching and pulling handles off the side of mugs; carving shapes into candle lanterns; waxing the foot-rings of dinner plates and then dipping them in large buckets of glaze; and unloading and reloading the electric bisque kilns and the high-fire gas kiln out back. The camaraderie of potters working together in a close work environment means an apprentice often has several more experienced potters to whom to turn as mentors, and a room full of work to observe. Yet the learning between these peers often moves beyond the technical; everyone in the shop shares creative energy, as potter Zoë Kingsbury describes:

I think, as a group, that's one of the coolest things that we can do for each other, is get ideas bouncing around because it lifts everybody up. You know, Bryan does something, and I try to imitate that, or I introduce a shape that isn't really being used, and then I see it coming out in other work, and I steal shapes from other people too. You add it to your repertoire and make it your own, but it lifts everybody up. (Kingsbury 2003a)

As the potters work side-by-side, they not only observe each others' techniques (like how to pull up the walls of a pot more quickly, or how to center and mount a bowl for trimming), but they also share ideas (like for shapes, as Kingsbury suggests). The movement of these ideas between potters boosts a kind of creative energy. Kingsbury's boss, Bryan Keeland, described this exchange among potters in similar terms, pointing to the movement of potters in and out of the space each year as "revitalizing" the shop. Well beyond his own apprenticeship years, he asserts that this kind of idea exchange aids not only the apprentice, but also *any* potter, and does so throughout his career:

The pottery shop is kind of unique because we have new people come in almost every year. At least one person won't come back the next year, so we will always have someone new, and I think that really revitalizes the shop. You kind of get stuck in a rut. You keep doing the same thing over and over and over, and you get these new people in, and you see them doing stuff, and then you get inspired, and, you know, you start experimenting. I think that is a real productive environment to be in. (Keeland 2003)

Beyond an apprenticeship to their boss and workmates, the potters seek to learn from outside masters through a variety of ceramic publications, including books and trade magazines. This widens the circle of potters to whom the apprentices turn for ideas



Illustration 6: The shop's ceramics library

of a technical sort and beyond. The typical learning exercise begins when the potter leafs through a book, picks out a technique or stylistic feature that appeals to him, works to duplicate it, and then finds ways to integrate the idea into his “own work.” In this way, the shop’s two-shelf ceramics library (above the microwave) plays an important role in the teaching.

In one in our series of interviews over my first summer, I asked the potters to pick out a few pots and discuss them with me. Potter Bryan Lynch picked out two small bulbous vases he had made and liked. With both, he implemented techniques he had seen used by Shoji Hamada in one of the shop’s books. In the first vase, Lynch had quickly sketched out a simple leaf pattern by brushing on a paste of iron-oxide, wax-reliefed the design, and then used a patchy brown-red glaze called a kaki to glaze the rest of the body, just as Hamada had. Lynch had glazed the second



Illustration 7: Lynch’s Hamada-inspired vase

vase first in a white matte glaze, and then brushed on a gestural grass design using a green and blue glaze overtop, another technique from Hamada. “The green kind of floats transparent on top of the white,” he said, making for a “nice watercolor effect” (Lynch 2002b).

Like Lynch and his Hamada-style vases, I saw many of the apprentices go to these ceramics books and magazines, find ideas for forms and finishes, and try them out freely in their own work at the shop. Many potters described these early trials as providing a stepping-stone to take these ideas off in new directions of their own. Lynch explained that this was an important way for him to learn and suggested that it mimicked the teaching function of a master study to which a young painter might submit, setting up an easel in a museum gallery to learn from the experience of duplicating a famous work.

Lead potter Bryan Keeland also saw the usefulness of trying out others' ideas or techniques and adapting them to fit his own vision. Here again, he shows that the same activity, useful to him as an apprentice just starting out, still serves him. The potter continues to glean ideas from others who share his craft:

One of the ways that you learn is by copying things that you see. I mean, I don't really think of that as stealing either, because I might make one or two that are like what I saw, but what I try to do is I take ideas from the process of making that and incorporate that into my own work, so the end product isn't going to look anything like the piece that I saw. But I might take some small idea, some small technique of how-to, or something from it. And you can really learn a lot from it that way. (Keeland 2002b)

What becomes increasingly important to the advanced potter, here, is that he discover ways to transform these ideas and make them somehow his "own," that these ideas follow new trajectories in his individual work.

As shown above, the SDC potters credit many as providing mentorship during their apprenticeship: the most experienced potter in the shop, their boss; their workmates; and published potters who share their work and ideas through various

media. The SDC potters were equally open-minded as they identified a broad spectrum of learning methods: explanation; observation; repetitive practice; critique; and their own work as demonstrators.

First, the apprentice seeks explanation of technical skills, like throwing, from others in the shop. When throwing a new piece, like a 2-pound mug, the apprentice can ask any of the more experienced potters to verbally unpack their process. The discussion may begin with talk about previous knowledge of throwing 1-pound mugs and then move into specific tips about how to manage the additional clay weight. From my own experience learning to throw, other potters' descriptions of the various hand positions I could use when pulling up the walls helped me find one that worked best for me.

Yet talk takes the apprentice just so far. Many note that observation (increasingly astute as the apprentices' own skills grow) often teaches them much more. As apprentice potter Zoë Kingsbury described, observation helps the learner pick up on the subtleties of her teacher's method, subtleties that even he may miss:

Throwing and improving my throwing is sort of Zen process. I open my focus to all of it—to the speed control, to the way the clay feels, to what it's doing—and try and bring that into a comprehensive whole, and find the parts of it that are not as good as they could be, or find where I can be more efficient. I learn the same way: I watch Bryan [Keeland] throw, and I just open my awareness to everything that he does because sometimes he doesn't even know exactly how he does it. (Kingsbury 2003b)

Kingsbury follows observation with her own trial-and-error:

I've discovered if you watch someone's hands (every little movement they make when they throw) and try and duplicate that—without understanding—just try and duplicate it . . . everything they do whether you understand it or not—then you learn why from your results or, you

know, you learn it was just a personal-style thing, and it actually kind of sucks. (Kingsbury 2003b)

When talk limits what the potter can share about his process at the wheel, observation can fill in the gaps. Kingsbury watches the movement of hands and the results of their quick work. She picks up steps her mentor might miss in his own explanation, like the amount of water he applies before his first pull, or the slip of his thumb to soften a rim.

Next, many of the potters stressed that learning, first and foremost, means practice. Discussion and observation help, but the apprentice must make time for practice, throwing a single form over and over until she produces it reliably.

My first summer, I lived with one of my new workmates, apprentice Katherine Chandler. She helped me understand the importance of a discipline of practice. When we met, Chandler was looking ahead to her junior year as a sculpture major at Missouri Southern State University. Little but wiry, Chandler had a quick and aggressive approach to clay that impressed me. As I



Illustration 8: Katherine Chandler

struggled with my finish work, I often watched Chandler as she quickly rolled out little perfect lugs of clay, slipped and attached them to her mugs, and easily pulled and stretched them into handles. She was determined to learn to throw large amounts of clay. She asked Keeland for permission to make the larger pots, onion jars and the big jack-o'-lanterns, and then relished the practice. When at school with no production schedule and no customers as found at SDC, she still dedicated herself to throwing a board full of vessels every day just to improve:

You just have to go in with that mindset that that's what you are going to have to do: practice, practice, practice. I mean, I would go into the ceramics school, wedge up little one pound/two pound balls of clay, and say, "Okay, this is all I'm going to do is make two pound cylinders, and that's all I'm going to do to practice. And then after I'm done, I'm going to wedge up twelve more. And then tomorrow, I'm going to come in, and wedge up twelve more," you know, and you kind of have to make yourself do that. But it gets kind of frustrating. It gets kind of boring. (Chandler 2004)

For Chandler, the repetition—indeed, the boredom of repetition—meant she was systematically mastering a variety of forms. Other potters in the shop reiterated again and again that their 40-hour week at



Illustration 9: Bryan Keeland and the author

the SDC shop gives them the practice time they need.

Our boss Bryan Keeland learned to make pots at SDC. Once himself an apprentice there, he has first-hand knowledge of what an apprenticeship at SDC means. Keeland grew up in a small Arkansas town not far from the northeast Missouri/Arkansas border near Branson; he and most of his siblings found their first jobs at SDC. He first took a job in SDC's print shop printing souvenir WANTED posters, and later worked in the tintype shop costuming guests in 1880s-period dress and making their portraits. Unhappy with his university computer science program, and finding himself back at SDC for another year, he decided that he could dedicate time working at the park to developing an advanced skill. He considered apprenticeships in several craft shops before settling in on the pottery. After two weeks proving his interest to the potters by joining them daily after work to practice, he got a job there and has worked as a SDC potter for over a decade. My first summer was his first season as the new boss.

Today, Keeland's brilliant throwing skills allow him to make anything he imagines at the wheel. Nothing seems too big. So it tickled me to hear about a time when he struggled like I did with his mugs. As Keeland described, his boss could only help him so much:

It's kind of like learning to swim when you are a kid. They throw you in the water and say, "Okay, swim," and that's pretty much how he did it. If I was really struggling with something, he would come up, and he would show me how to make it. And of course, somebody can show you how to do anything, but until you sit down and do it over and over and figure it out for yourself—that's really the way you learn. (Keeland 2002A)

All the apprentices agreed with Chandler and Keeland that learning requires constant practice. This practice, in turn, must be repetitive. This is why Chandler

spent a part of each school-day turning out a board full of identical one-pound vessels. At SDC, the production schedule—fueled by customers’ high demand for wares like pie plates, spoon rests, and mugs (i.e. Chandler’s “one/two pound vessels”)—builds in that practice naturally. When I came to SDC, I still struggled with one pound of clay, so most of my early pieces—mugs, and more mugs—ended up on the seconds shelf and sold for half price. My second summer, I started working with one and a half pounds to produce dozens of another high demand piece—a jack-o-lantern—that broadened my skills because it had a round shape, a lid, and required special finish work. During his years of apprenticeship, Keeland made them too:

My first month, I think all I made was mugs, and every once in a while I would slip in a little pot or a little vase or something just to break the monotony. But for three months, that’s all I did—mugs. Then I slowly branched out into other things. I remember one winter (I think it was probably my third winter here) all I did was make jack o’ lanterns for most of the winter (the small ones and the big ones both), and I was so mad because, you know, I came here to make pottery. I didn’t come here to make jack-o’-lanterns. But it was actually pretty good for me because working on jack-o’-lanterns all winter—‘cause that shape—I mean, it is just a round shape, a round jar shape—so by doing that over and over and over, I got to where I could do that shape really well, and it really improved my other pots. That was something that maybe I didn’t want to do, but it turned out to be really good. (Keeland 2002a)

The beginning apprentice spends most of a summer making one pound mugs for the shop. With time, the workload expands to new shapes: the large bulbous cylinder for candle lanterns; the round, lidded jars for jack-o’-lanterns; and the high-lipped plates for pie plates. After producing board after board of these shapes, the apprentice’s skills grow. The work shows progress as the pots improve; they have more lift to their shapes, use less clay, and thus feel lighter. With repetitive practice,



Illustration 10: The author's jack-o'-lanterns

the apprentices begin to produce pieces that look almost identical when they set this as the goal.

Fourth on the list of learning modes, the SDC potters also learn by critiquing each other's work; such assessment often follows the model of the "class critique," a learning model frequently utilized by university ceramics programs. In Katherine Chandler's ceramics classes at her university, the days a kiln load came out, the class convened to

talk about each other's pots. Chandler sought this kind of critique from her boss at SDC:

I went up to Bryan, and I said, "Look, I want to get better. I want to be able to throw larger things better, so tear my stuff apart, and tell me everything that is wrong with it, and show me how I can make it better because, you know, basically, I'd say that I'm 99% down here because I want to become a better potter." (Chandler 2002b)

Apprenticeship in the shop involves critique even when not expressly solicited. As I learned to throw mugs, Bryan Keeland would periodically review my work, once even slicing one of my mugs in two to show me the thick part of the wall

at the foot. Other potters would often provide critique by pointing out pieces they liked or by offering suggestions.

The fifth mode of learning involves the act of demonstrating. Even as a beginner, I often found myself in the role of teacher when at the demonstration wheel. Through my attempts to verbalize my process to park guests, I became more aware of my work and began to see ways to streamline and internalize my approach. After several demonstrations making spoon rests, for example, I had my task down to a science. My step-by-step explanation to guests helped me realize that I only needed to add more water once after centering the clay, so that I would not have to keep picking up a rib to push the extra water off the piece. In general, talking aloud about what I was doing showed me the points where I fussed too long over the piece and helped me remember what steps I took to create a specific shape.

In conclusion, the apprentices at SDC have many ways to learn. They learn from their boss and from each other during time set aside to talk about their approach, each trying their best to describe with words work ultimately done by hands. When words fail, the apprentices watch each other closely to catch the subtle movements of hands, observing, too, their impact on the clay. Then the apprentices draw on what they have seen and discussed, and work these lessons into their own hands; with much practice, they slowly build their own skills. With finished pieces, the potters offer each other critique, training their eyes to see small improvements in their pots' thrown shapes, finish work, and glazing. Finally when

apprentices demonstrate to guests, they themselves play the role of teacher, a process that helps them see their own progress more clearly.

Having considered both how and from whom these apprentices learn, let us turn our attention to *what* they learn. Work at the SDC pottery allows apprentices to build the wide-range of skills and knowledge required of potters. I see these skills falling into five groups: the kinesthetic (throwing, pulling handles, etc.); the technical (the chemistry behind clay bodies and glazes, and kiln building and firing); the aesthetic (developing a sense for form and how clay body, glaze, and firing choices complement form); the creative (practice at developing one's "own work"); and the commercial (running a shop as a business).

For these apprentices, much of their focus falls on learning to throw; they need to build up the kinesthetic knowledge to move clay. As a beginner, my first challenge at pottery class became learning to center. I watched my teacher first. She threw a ball of clay down on the wheel head, kicked forcefully to bring it to a high speed, and applied a sponge full of water to the lump to make it slick for her hands. She showed that by cupping one hand at the side and applying pressure pushing in, while then using the opposite hand to push the clay back down from the top as it attempted to rise, she could force the clay to move into the center of the wheel. Applying anything other than a fluid, even, steady pressure—allowing the hands to jolt up or waver a bit as the high spots in the mound quickly come by, slapping the hand—would only compound the mounds' unevenness instead of mediating it. By the time I centered the ball, half of the clay ended up as slip in the splashguard because I kept applying more water. Learning to pull the walls up,

finding the right hand position and the right kind of touch to apply even pressure from the inside and outside to gently squeeze the wall and thin it, and then finding just the right timing to follow the clay's slow rise took most of my first summer. With small successes, like pulling the wall just a little higher than before, I slowly learned how my hands could do the work.

When seeking a job at SDC, I applied to the shop's previous lead, Todd Nelson, who had moved to the glass shop just a month before I arrived. While an art major in Minnesota during the seventies, Nelson had split his time between the college's clay and glass shop. But for sixteen years at SDC, he worked exclusively in clay, most of that time as the shop's lead. Nelson fit my vision of the SDC craftsman: long grey hair; beard; and that twinkle in his eye. Nelson rode home from work on a Harley. Even though I never worked with him, I got to know Nelson better because he sat with our all-craftsmen group in the employee lounge for lunch, and later spoke with me in a series of interviews.

Nelson had been in the glass shop just a few months when we first met, and while he had been a highly accomplished technician and artist in clay, he was in the process of gaining his footing in glass. His making this switch to glass became a way for him to talk about apprenticeship with me, because he saw that he had many years ahead to become an expert at glassblowing; he helped me develop my ideas about kinesthetic learning. He discussed what it means to learn about a material and what it will do, telling me that, "I learn a lot just because I watch the glass. I mean it's the physics of the thing. I see things that happen when you touch it, and it makes it different" (Nelson 2002). His perspective was that of an accomplished

craftsman, someone already familiar with the kind of eye and practice it would take to learn what this new material would do before he could use it to easily execute his ideas:

I can't control the glass yet. I'm not able to do what I want to do. I mean I can see things in my mind that I want to do with glass, and it is easy for me to see them, but execution—I don't have the skills. Eye-hand coordination is not to a point where I can do it yet. (Nelson 2003)

Nelson discussed those same ideas in regard to his clay work:

The clay always talked to me too. I mean, you yourself know that you get up there, and you've got clay that is soaking wet, it's going to tell you one thing, and you've got clay that is pretty stiff, you can do a lot more with it. If the clay is slip in a bag, you are going to make pots three inches tall. If it is nice and firm, you are going to take that same amount of clay and make one six inches tall, and it is just because you listen to the material. . . . I start throwing it; I can tell what this clay is going to be like. I mean, porcelain is wiggly, unforgiving. . . . If you have got a clay that has got a lot of gravel in it, it is going to act a lot different than if you get to the total other side of the spectrum, which is your porcelain, which is smooth and like cream cheese, and each one is going to tell you different things as you begin to play with it, work with it. I consider it play. (2002)

For Nelson, a highly developed knowledge of the materials—of glass and of clay—guided his approach. The eye and touch both play a role in his understanding.

Sociologist Douglas Harper develops the idea of kinesthetic knowledge through a close study of work by his upstate New York mechanic Willie in *Working Knowledge* (1987). Willie uses many senses (visual, tactile, auditory, even olfactory) as he solves complex mechanical problems to repair and redesign machines. As Harper writes, the outside observer can only describe Willie's process as "intuitive." Willie's experience with a variety of machines and processes over many years built up his "working knowledge," a kind of knowledge that could only come through such experience. The ideas of "intuition" and "working knowledge" elucidate a potter's

work in clay, because developing the kinesthetic knowledge to throw pots with precision requires a similar kind of “intuition” only developed by gaining the same depth of work experience. When apprentice Katherine Chandler read one of my earlier thesis proposals, she said she liked that I brought in Harper’s ideas to further my own thinking:

I think that is a good way to look at it. You really have to get to know clay. You have to know what it does, and I think that is “intuition” for the materials. . . . Everyone figures clay out differently, and at their own pace, and in their own way, and they figure different things out from other people. I think that’s very important about pottery and about learning. (Chandler 2004)

The potter’s kinesthetic knowledge is, as former lead potter Todd Nelson says, about “eye-hand coordination” and about a deep understanding of the material itself, clay. With practice, the apprentice learns how to use his hands, their dexterity and strength, to control the clay on the wheel. Harper points to the importance of “working knowledge” in gaining these skills. Experience in clay (failed pots and new successes) builds the potter’s understanding of what the material can do.

While apprentices must focus intently on building their kinesthetic knowledge of clay, putting in many hours to learn to center and pull it up, this kinesthetic knowledge must be complemented by a body of knowledge I call “technical.” The SDC apprentices participate in activities that help them develop their mastery of technical tasks like devising their own clay bodies and glazes; building and controlling a kiln during a fire; selecting, maintaining, and utilizing a variety of machines available to potters; and visually diagnosing problems that indicate mistakes made when throwing or joining clay, or that signal a clay body/glaze incompatibility evident after the fire. Like kinesthetic knowledge, experience builds

this knowledge. The potters also acquire technical knowledge from other potters in the shop, or from outside potters through books, trade magazines, web forums, conferences, etc. Through these sources, potters share knowledge about building kilns, for example, or creating glazes. When just beginning, potters may learn by assisting in mixing up a shop glaze, by working with an experienced potter to devise and test a new one, or by learning the quirks of firing the shop's new gas kiln. Many potters believe that acquiring full technical knowledge of their craft will set them apart from other potters who have neglected to obtain this training, because the ability to devise their own clay bodies, glazes, and so forth gives them full control over their work.

The SDC apprentices also want to develop their aesthetic knowledge. With time they develop their awareness of shape, noticing the subtle differences between their pieces, deciding which shapes appeal most to the eye. From his own apprenticeship, Bryan Keeland remembers the critiques he received from his mentor, Todd Nelson:

He would talk a lot about relationships between, like, the neck of a pot and the body of a pot. What makes a pot look good to the eye is often—you can almost base it on mathematics. The size of the bottom of the neck to the size of the lid, to the height of the top to the height of the body, everything relates together. We would talk about that. These little squiggle lines that I put on my pots—he always hated that I just left it trailing off. . . . He always thought that it should keep going until it got to a place next to the spout where it could just blend back into the form. And I always thought of it as being like a wisp of cloud or something. It's just kind of out there, kind of hanging in space. That's what I liked about it. There are differences in thought. (2002b)

Here what appeals to the eye seems, on the one hand, mathematically defined, or, on the other, open to interpretation and to the variety of ideas a pot's shape portrays.

Keeland talked with me about a new teapot design he was working on and pointed to the way the various components “work together” in a kind of “harmony” to give the piece both a “balanced look” and, for this particular piece, a



Illustration 11: Keeland's teapot

“whimsical” appearance (2002b). Here again, his aesthetic interpretation steps between that which is balanced, harmonious, and, thus, mathematical, and that which speaks to the viewer in an almost theatrical way:

Teapots are a lot of fun . . . a lot of things you can do to dress them up and alter them. They have so many components. . . . You have the body of the teapot. You have the spout. You have a handle and a lid. Ideally, when you make one, you have to get all those pieces working together in harmony, so it lends a little more room for artistic license because, you know, you can make a funky little lid or just things like that. I kind of like [my teapots like this one] because they kind of remind me of like a turtle shell, or I did some that were like this that kind of reminded me of little bull dogs because just the stance that they have. . . . People can look at it, and they may not see what I see, not even what I intended, but they are going to see something in the shape. I mean them to be real whimsical. (2002b)

To continue his aesthetic analysis, he pointed out how the spiral, which he often gives to his spouts, “adds quite a bit of interest” and discussed the way he had experimented with pulling and then joining the teapot’s handle from two sides. “This handle seems almost organic in a way. The way it attaches at the bottom, it kind of spreads out like a tree grows.” He said the three-leg foot of the pot provided extra stability and lifted the spout up to the right height in relationship to the lid, while also

making the pot appear to “float.” He was unhappy with one of the components, the lid:

It’s just flat and stupid. I mean it doesn’t have any character. It doesn’t work with the rest of the piece. . . . The spout is curved. The body is curved. The handle is curved. And then you just have this flat, chopped off lid on there. I need to figure out someway that that works with the rest of the form. (2002b)

Here Keeland focuses his analysis on the shape of his teapot, which was, at that time, an unfinished, bisque-fired piece. This focus on form is much like that experienced by apprentices, who typically begin their aesthetic journey by evaluating simple shapes. As their aesthetic knowledge grows, the apprentices begin to make more refined choices about how to complement a particular form with other choices like clay body, glaze and glaze technique, and firing. Also, as part of that growth, the potters begin to pick up on more ways to refine what Katherine Chandler calls “craftsmanship”: how to join pieces neatly; how to add details to the pot (like a line around the bottom to catch glaze); and how to trim the bottom of the pot while it is still on the wheel to narrow the foot. As Chandler understands it, craftsmanship entails all “those little ways to accentuate a pot,” making it “a finishing touch kind of thing”:

I try to make it look appealing to the eye, pleasing, something that . . . the eye is going want to travel throughout the whole pot, and say, “Oh, well, look at this, and this little tiny thing here, and look at this little thing here.” . . . I believe that there is a reason that these pots look good. It is because people take the time to make everything perfected as best as they can. (Chandler 2002a)

With time, with exposure to each other’s pots, and with the attendant discussion, the apprentices begin to train their aesthetic appreciation of their work. They may not always agree on what looks good, but they do share a rubric. They

consider balance as well as what the pot “says” to them. They look outside the form of the pot to how clay body, glaze, and firing complement the shape. They look at both the pot’s overall impact, and at its details, the “craftsmanship” touches.

SDC apprentices also build their skills to work creatively. While the potters must produce functional pieces—i.e. “kitchen pots”—made efficiently to keep costs low, as well as pieces that, indeed, “sell,” the potters still find room to find their own style. During their time at the shop, apprentices practice developing their “own work,” an idea I will discuss in greater detail in a later chapter. They began to experience what

it feels like to have an idea and run with it, using their time spent producing pots for sale to take that idea in several directions, exploring the possibilities one idea sparks. Lynch, for example, started applying slip to many of his pots and carving designs through it (a technique called sgraffito). Zoë Kingsbury focused on a tulip shape she liked and began using it frequently, pairing it with different handles and trying it out on her mugs, candle lanterns, and goblets. One month, I created several dozen stamps, and started applying them to my work, like wallpaper patterns: carved seashell shapes, trees, and girly hearts, flowers, and stars.



Illustration 12: Lynch carves a sgraffito design into a blue-slipped vase.

Keeland wants his apprentices to work creatively, which to him means they need to develop their discipline to take an idea and keep after it:

Follow through with your ideas. I kind of have the same problem. I'll play around with an idea, and then I'll get bored of it, and I will quit. And you have got to force yourself to keep playing around with it, until you get something that works. Because, yeah, you get frustrated when things don't work out, and you just want to shove it in a corner, but you have got to keep picking at it until you make it work. (Keeland 2003)

Here I link creativity with ideas;

to work creatively is to follow through with those ideas through multiple pieces, as Keeland describes, until the idea “works.” An apprentice at any stage may begin to work in this way, like Lynch did with his blue-slipped



Illustration 13: The author's stamps

sgraffito pieces. While the execution of ideas certainly improves with experience, apprentices too can practice the discipline of letting an idea motivate their work.

Finally, many of the potters find that an apprenticeship at SDC gives them the commercial skills needed to run a pottery as a business. First, they get the experience of creating pots for real customers. They see which pots sell and for what price. The demonstrations give them an opportunity to meet customers and learn about their interests and tastes in pottery. Many SDC apprentices have commented on the importance of the demonstration to sales, noting that guests like to buy pots from the potters they meet and watch. Some apprentices have looked carefully at how SDC prices their pots using a rubric that accounts for a variety of costs: materials, equipment wear, space, electricity and gas, and, importantly, labor

time. Then they see how the pieces take a 100% markup when they move upstairs to the gallery to account for retailing costs and to create profit. The experience at SDC would be hard to duplicate; few independent potteries could expect the kind of traffic the theme park location provides. The experience can help the apprentice learn to work to meet high demand. That means keeping the retail shelves and the storage shelves stocked so that they never miss a sale because “we’re out.” A stint at SDC serves as a needed preparation period before stepping out to work on their own as independent potters.

As the apprentices build their skill and knowledge—kinesthetic, technical, aesthetic, creative, and commercial—they move towards full acceptance in their field. To have the kinesthetic and technical skills to work with large amounts of clay, to devise their own clay and glaze bodies, and to manage their own kilns and other shop equipment give the potters full command of their work. To have the experience required to develop the aesthetic eye and to have practice working creatively give the potters’ work depth. Then to have developed some commercial savvy gives the potters the opportunity to turn pottery-making into a living.

Through their apprenticeship spent working with experienced potters creating functional wares, the apprentice potters prepare themselves for a variety of careers. Many of the potters view experience as a functional potter as facilitating a career as a clay and ceramic equipment manufacturer, a ceramics teacher, a sculptor (even when often working off the wheel), and, most seamlessly, as a functional potter who makes a living producing either one-of-a-kind pieces or high volumes of similar or

replica pieces. Some potters stay at SDC for just a summer or two, some for a few years, others indefinitely.

Katherine Chandler's two-summer stint at SDC provides one example of how an apprentice can draw on her experience as she moves into another career. Chandler came to SDC to build her skills, particularly, her throwing skills. Having already learned a few different ways to throw from her previous teachers, at SDC she

reworked her approach, learning and following Keeland's techniques. She learned how to wheel wedge the clay to center it, how to collar in a piece to make the bottom smaller, how to wax a piece without drips—lots of tricks. Over her two summers, she developed much greater control. Chandler found that the skills she built during her apprenticeship producing functional wares served her well as she set herself to making sculpture. At SDC, Chandler would often come in before her clock-in time to watch Bryan Keeland in his morning demo, particularly on those days he made large urns by stacking two separately thrown pieces. In the same manner that Keeland stacked pieces to make large urns, Chandler built the torso of her self-portrait piece for her senior show as a sculpture major.

Chandler knows that she is just beginning to learn about clay, and that her preparation will take many years. Her professor Dewane Hughes described that kind of knowledge as moving along “a grey scale.” She recalls:



Illustration 14: Chandler in her university studio

You have white, and you have black, and you have the scale. . . . He said, "You are still in white. I'm just in the gray." Well, he said, "I'm in the gray, and then you are probably just entering the gray," he said. "And then the big name potters like Pete Voulkos and Clayton Bailey and Paul Soldner and those, they are probably in the dark, dark gray. But I'm not sure that I know of anyone who is in the black yet." (Chandler 2004)

Todd Nelson suggested another model:

It's like music, you know. You go, and you practice scales, and then you can play all the songs that are in C. And then you've got one that's got one flat, and you've got to learn where the notes are. And pretty soon you can play things with four flats or five sharps or whatever, you know. And that doesn't happen overnight either, does it? And why does it happen at all? Because you have the passion to get in there and learn where the notes are. That's an analogy that I've used down there in the clay shop for kids all the time. "How long have you been doing this?" "How long does it take to get good?" "Well, it is like playing the piano: learn the notes and then you can play the songs and make the music." (Nelson 2002)

As both these descriptions suggest, the apprentices build their knowledge slowly and progressively. They may tackle critical skills like throwing first, and then round out their knowledge of other technical processes over time, all while slowly improving their aesthetic eye for shape and detail.

Overtly confirming this trajectory of learning is a copied quotation tacked to the SDC shop's wall. The quotation, by Kansas City potter Ken Ferguson, reads:

Four things a student must learn:

1. He must have some skill.
2. He must develop a sense of form.
3. He must pay attention to details.
4. He must develop some control of the kiln.

Somewhere later in his career is surface decoration. This finishes the whole thing and ties his training together!

Bryan Lynch took to Ferguson's words to heart. Ferguson wrote about the progression of a potters' knowledge from first developing some skill, sense of form,

attention to detail,
and control of the
kiln to, later in his
career, developing
various approaches
to surface
decoration. Lynch
saw himself
following the
progression

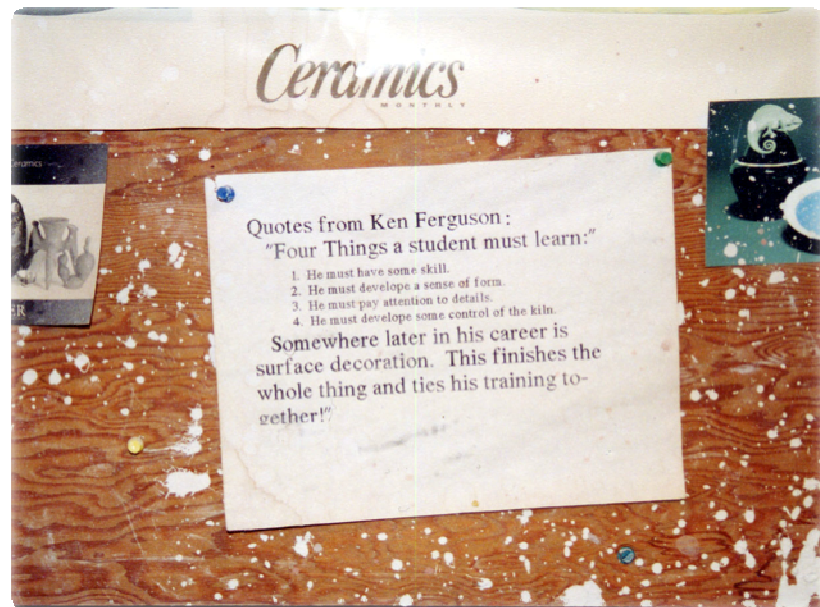


Illustration 15: Ferguson quote posted in the shop

Ferguson suggests. When I came back the second summer, I immediately saw how much Lynch's throwing skill had improved. His little jack-o'-lantern pumpkins had new buoyancy in their shape, and showed new attention to finishing details. I asked him to describe his progress:

I have a lot more control over what I want: I picture a shape in my mind, and I am able to make it. . . . My handles are a lot better: I'm able to tie the handle in a lot better with form; they blend into the piece instead of just looking attached. I am able to throw more consistently; I can throw the same form pretty close (I mean more than three times). Just generally, I guess, with more practice, I have more control now. It just feels like—like, I can look at a pot now, and see something just thrown off the wheel, and I can see what it needs just to give it a little bit more, just like a simple marking here or a line or something. I can kind of tell if that is going to make a nice pot or not. (Lynch 2003a)

Lynch continues to build his throwing skill and attention to detail, but here shows a beginning understanding of how surface decoration can, as Ferguson writes, give unity to a piece, and how it evolves through many years of training and experience.

I have heard some of the potters say it takes seven years to learn to throw. Some talk about how the potters' skills reach a plateau and then later begin to progress again. Others point to how the potter can always improve; the learning that began during apprenticeship continues throughout a potter's career. Whatever the course of this trajectory, it begins with apprenticeship, as a potter sets a course to enter the profession as an active learner.

Although it has special character inside SDC, all potters experience apprenticeship. The same holds true of the two roles in the following chapters, production potter and studio potter. Both are terms and identities not unique to SDC, although we will look at how they direct the potters' understanding of, and thus their approach to their work inside the park. The next chapter shows how the SDC shop functions as a production setting, wherein apprentices attain the sustained practice they need to learn.

Chapter III

PRODUCTION POTTER

I kind of took a relaxed approach in college [laughs], but here you have to work all the time, and it forces you to be more disciplined. . . . You make a pot, and it is no big deal. You make hundreds and hundreds of pots; so, you make a pot, and you move on. That is what it has taught me: the more you work, the more work you put out, the more time you have to experiment. It is more realistic in the fact that I don't really concentrate on one piece all the time, one pot. I just kind of make a bunch of them. I don't know. It is not so art-schooly. (Lynch 2002a)

For potter Bryan Lynch, coming to work in a production-minded setting like SDC helped him develop a “realistic” approach to pottery making. He could think back on his wheel work during college, where he took a “relaxed approach” at best. When I asked him to clarify his term, “art-schooly,” he pointed to how much time he used to spend on his pots. At the university, he made only a few pots each day. He slowly suffered through his wheel work; lack of practice meant his throwing skills were still weak. Even finish work, like pulling handles, might mean ruining a pot he had already spent too-much-time on. When he came to the shop at SDC, his boss expected him to turn out pots quickly. He never had to worry over any one pot because he would soon make more. His experience in a production setting helped him decide, “I kind of realize that I like to move on.”

The potters were quick to identify themselves and their work at SDC as “production,” believing that most potters looking in on their position would view them the same way. To think of themselves as production potters emphasizes two key

features of their work at SDC: a) maintaining a high level of production, a goal they keep to b) satisfy the interests and year-round demand of the shop's heavy customer traffic. This chapter will detail how the SDC potters meet these goals, and then will share the potters' mixed feelings about working in a production setting. The chapter will close by showing how the SDC potters have reshaped their work to dampen some of the negativity they see in pure production work by integrating elements of a studio potter's work mode into their own. The next chapter will develop this idea further.

Before proceeding, let me offer some key details about how this particular production pottery runs. During the summer, while the park opens seven days a week, the shop employs as many as six potters by hiring additional apprentices. The four or five potters working the shop on any given day keep the demonstration wheel in the upstairs retail gallery running nine hours a day. Each potter takes a turn working at the demo wheel for an hour in the morning and again for an hour to an hour and a half in the afternoon. They spend the rest of the day working in the private workspace downstairs doing finish-work on pots thrown the previous day (finish work accounts for about two-thirds of the labor time invested in each piece). In terms of compensation, each potter works a forty-hour week and earns an hourly wage; those who work at the shop year-round also receive benefits that include health insurance and profit sharing programs. As a "Tyro Craftsman" (the designation for a new apprentice hire), I received a three-month summer contract for a wage of \$7.50 an hour, and like the rest, worked 40 hours. During an hour at the demo wheel, I could throw eight mugs. Between an hour of throwing in the morning

and my hour and a half in the afternoon, I might produce 20 mugs—about half the quantity and quality of what my boss might produce in the same time. I assisted the shop most by helping to keep the demonstrations going all day long. During the fall and winter, the shop scales back the shop's total demonstration time as the work force drops to four and then to three. Yet despite fewer demos, customer sales continue through all three seasons. After Christmas, when stocks reach a yearly low, the park closes for two months, and the potters use the time to get a head start on stocking the shop for the following year. They work from a production list generated by management. It lists every item the shop produces and how many the shop has in stock; it then projects how many more pieces should be produced to meet expected sales for the year based on the shop's sales history. A kiln load comes out at least once a week, and the count of new stock helps the shop and its managers keep track of the group's progress.

Everyone in the shop works to keep the same list of goods stocked. They also share some labor tasks (for example, all fire their work in a shared kiln) and maintain a workspace conducive



Illustration 16: Downstairs counting the latest kiln load and updating the production list

to moving a steady flow of pots through the many stages of the production process. As I will discuss, the individual potter throws similar pieces all at one time and often simplifies designs to lessen the labor time required of each piece.

The shop's production list fills many pages; it itemizes every item the potters produce. The potters make a full line of functional wares, mostly "kitchen pots," as



Illustration 17: Bisqueware pots

one potter described them. They make dinnerware sets, teapots, casseroles, soup tureens, platters, mugs in four sizes, batter bowls, soup bowls, mixing bowls, berry bowls, strainers, grease jars, spoon jars, Irish coffee mugs, mustache mugs, straw mugs, soup mugs, apple bakers, canister sets, utensil holders, salt and pepper shakers, scrubby holders, etc. Moving beyond the kitchen, they make vases, urns, candle holders, candle

lanterns, strawberry planters, fountains, toothbrush holders, soap dispensers, soap dishes, powder jars, ring holders, business card holders, communion sets, and so on. All work to keep these items in stock, though they can utilize their own designs.

While the potters do make a team effort to produce a wide variety of pots, they have not attempted to speed production by dividing up the labor on individual pieces, as other production potteries often do. When I asked the potters to help me

understand the term “production potter,” several responded by offering examples of potteries that they viewed as “typical” production settings. One of these potteries has an online catalog that offers a complete collection of pots for the home in named designs. As the SDC potters explained, in order for this online pottery to offer specific handmade designs in large quantities, many workers must have learned to replicate the designs. They probably also divided the labor of each piece: one potter throws mug shapes, another attaches and pulls the handles, and so forth. At SDC, the potters do not divide the labor; they share it. They each work on their own pieces, yet all work together to produce the same list of goods.

The shop mates share some supporting tasks to increase the group’s efficiency. Typically, one or two of the beginning apprentices unload and load the two electric bisque kilns each morning. For this daily bisque fire, they look through the drying racks and select only well-dried pieces. Before loading them, they look over each piece (particularly the carved jack-o’-lanterns) to sand down rough carved-edges and empty out debris. For the second fire of glazed bisqueware pieces, the group fires all work in common in the large gas kiln behind the shop. Everyone helps load the kiln. They fire it every few days when the group has produced enough to fill it. As another timesaver, the shop mixes up glazes in large trashcans for all to share. Keeland, in his role as the shop’s lead, sees to it that the shop keeps all needed supplies on hand. The retail staff, who work as a team upstairs, help the potters greatly by inventorying each kiln load, keeping the displays upstairs filled and neat, and attending to the shop’s steady stream of customers.

Beyond shared tasks, the communal workspace itself contributes to a production vibe. The shop layout includes areas designated for pugging clay, extruding, wheel work, glazing, bisque firing, and high firing. Often the potters make use of all workstations simultaneously, allowing the shop to get the most out of its expensive equipment. Their efforts to use and then free up machines for others help keep up the pace of the work.

While the potters do not divide up the labor of individual pieces, they do make an effort to keep their own time investment in each piece low. Hence, during an hour of throwing at the demonstration wheel, the potter typically makes only one type of piece, for example, a board of a dozen cylinder shapes for mugs or pairs of



Illustration 18: Keeland's soap dispensers thrown together in one sitting

matched lids and round jars for jack o' lanterns. It is better to get in the groove of making a single item than to constantly switch modes between several shapes. The potters also limit labor time by simplifying their designs. Often, the potters do all they can at the wheel (wheel work is characteristically fast),

creating designs that require limited finish work off the wheel. For example, when they sit down to throw a mug, they leave just the right amount of clay on the bottom,

carefully trim the pot's bottom to yield a beveled foot, and then use the handle end of a trimming stick to press in a line around the bottom to catch molten glaze during the fire. By taking these simple steps at the wheel, they give the mug a finished foot that requires little extra effort. The next day, the potters might need to run a finger over any marks left by the drying board, but they will not need to take time to put the mug back on the wheel bottom up, recenter it, and trim in a foot ring. They may continue to simplify their finish work by opting to attach and pull the handle right off the mug; other types of handles first pulled and then reshaped, trimmed, and attached to the mug with slip give a different look, but take more time. The potters rarely alter the pots, as they might by cutting and then rejoining walls to transform a pot's round wheel-thrown shape into another. All in all, the many ways the potters simplify their designs (few foot rings, quickly-pulled handles, little altering) change the overall look of the pots; they become what many potters call "production pots." In this way, the potters' work mode as production potters has a strong impact on the total aesthetic of the pots themselves.

The potters' high level of production aids them as they strive to meet the interests and demands of their customers, which is key to maintaining their identity as (successful) production potters. This high level of production, paired with controlled labor investment in each piece, makes the trade both affordable and profitable for customer and potter. A high level of production also assures the availability of pots. Thus, production potters first hallmark goal—high production—helps fulfill the next—mutually beneficial exchange between potter and client.

For the production potter, the goal becomes to make what sells. To meet that goal, the potter's aesthetic may shift away from that held inside the academy, as Zoë Kingsbury joked:

If you come from the academic world, you are like, "Oh, yeah, wood firing and raku and other things that I can't sell and that take a lot of time! Oh, yeah, primitive pottery that just looks like I just didn't learn how to throw!" It's all very exciting. And when you are trying to do production and sell functional things to people, it's like, "Sleek, smooth lines, things that I can persuade other people to buy." (Kingsbury 2004)

While the SDC potters get to see and interact with their crowd in at least a superficial way through their demonstrations, they still know little about individual customers and how they view the pots before them. Yet as illustrated above, Kingsbury and the other potters have ideas about what their customers want. When discussing customer tastes, the SDC potters often invoke the imaginary figure of Ms. Checkbook, a character that Nelson introduced to the shop. He learned about Ms. Checkbook at college, where his professor explained: "She is the person who votes with her checkbook to tell you how successful your work is." Ms. Checkbook allows the potters to talk about what they think customers want; she gives them an audience to envision when they create pots.

Kingsbury started elaborating on the Ms. Checkbook idea by giving her a new name, Lurleen, and a voice, a little redneck or Southern. Kingsbury would often act out exchanges between Lurleen and her friends as they looked over our pots in the gallery:

"Oh, my God, would you look at this, Lurleen? Oh, my God, this is just precious!" You know, whenever I make something particularly cute, I just think of one of these women and their, "Oh, my goodness, this would just go right in my bathroom because I've got the same colors." (Kingsbury 2004)

[Lurleen] doesn't really know anything about pottery except that she likes it. She is perfectly willing to buy cute. She doesn't give a rat's ass if it is [in a snob's voice] "art." She cares that it is the right price, and it's pretty, and it goes with the rest of her kitchen. (Kingsbury 2003b)

Several of the SDC potters adopted the idea of Ms. Checkbook, and filled out her caricature, yielding this composite stereotype: Ms. Checkbook is not looking for the art pot; she wants function. The shop's full line of functional wares helps assure that she will find the pot she needs. She might even choose to buy up several pieces together as a functional set. She looks for pots that fit with her environment, pots that will match her kitchen or her bathroom, pots that fulfill a daily use or specific decorative need. She likes the bright colors, especially blues, and prefers a syrupy glaze that covers the whole pot completely, thus keeping out water and assuring an easy wash. She inquires about whether or not the dishes are microwave and oven safe, more practical concerns. As the stereotype evolved among the group, the potters began to set the standard accordingly, asking of each pot, "Will Ms. Checkbook buy it?"

The previous section points to the defining qualities of production work (high output and a guiding interest in meeting customers' tastes and demand) and shows how the centrality of these goals leads the SDC potters to identify with the term "production potter." To summarize, the SDC potters bolster their production by focusing their collected work towards a single production list. Their ability to share specific labor tasks and a workspace planned for efficiency assist them in their efforts. Behind the wheel, throwing similar pieces in groups and simplifying designs to limit finish work help the individual potter limit his labor investment in each

individual piece. A high level of production paired with efforts to limit the time given to each pot make the trade between potter and customer profitable and affordable. The production potter wants to satisfy customer interests. The SDC potters envision their customer and aim to satisfy her interests, as they understand them. They see their customer, Ms. Checkbook, as wanting pots that serve their function well and that fit her own space.

Production work does not only benefit the customer and the shop; it also benefits the potters. Bryan Lynch's description at the chapter's opening—where he described how work in a production setting transformed is work habits—aptly illustrates one such benefit. Apprentices at SDC find that the production mode allows them to develop their throwing skills and a host of other abilities. Every pot presents an additional chance to practice a new finishing technique, try a new glaze, and to learn more about firing. While the volume of work builds skills, it also builds the potters' efficiency. When Kingsbury sits down to make a board full of pots all nearly alike, she finds ways to do it better:

Well, for one thing, I'm just doing it over and over and over again. Everything that I do I throw more than one at a time, and there's a value to drill. There's a value to that, that, I mean, you are not going to find in other things. If you just throw something once, you will do it inefficiently. You will do it roughly. You may throw it again at some other time, but you won't have been doing it over and over again and thinking, "Alright, I'm going to bust these out. How I'm I going to save time here?" How, you know, "If I do this now rather than later on, am I wasting time? Am I just fussing? When do I quit? When do I just start on another one?" It leaves you a lot of freedom to improve your process. (Kingsbury 2003b)

Lynch saw that building his efficiency at making pots, as Kingsbury describes, freed up more time for the creative side of his work. He could make the basic form

quickly and then focus on refining the shape. The growth of his skills and efficiency allow him to execute his ideas more easily.

Things I've done previously, I'll know how to do because I've done them so much. Plus, it is the speed, too. You can get to the stuff like pulling the walls up (doing the basic stuff) before you get the pot started. You can do that quickly and not have to worry about it, and the creativity is what is important, like the finishing off of it, the final adjustments, and the shapes. (Lynch 2002b)

Several of the potters discussed how not only the volume of work produced, but also the standard of throwing similar pieces at one sitting, promoted creativity. For Nelson, the repetition (a mug, then a dozen mugs) helped him think about new ways to produce the piece, as well as new designs.

To me, one thing I've always said: sitting down there and doing production in a clay studio has led me to more creative thoughts because I'll be sitting down there, and I'll be making this mug, and I'll be making two dozen of them or whatever, and while I'm doing that, I'm still designing other things in my head. Because the act of repetition just brings the creativity up over and over and over, and you see another way to do that, another way to get that shape. (Nelson 2002)

Apprentice Katherine Chandler, too, found that turning out pieces in multiples gave her new ideas, particularly when she let the design slowly shift. As she built a dozen watering cans, she found many new ways to mix and match components.

It definitely builds ideas. . . . They don't have to be the exact same form. . . . I did one, and then I had an idea for another one, and I kept getting better and better and better. The body changed along with the rest of these little tiny nuances. Like, I'd get an idea for, well, "I could alter the pot like this," or, "I could bring the pot up like this," or "I could have a flat top on it." . . . You think about that kind of stuff while you are doing all this finish work and all this hand-building work, and so, yeah, you definitely get better at it. (Chandler 2002b)

As the potters have shown, the fast pace of work in a production setting offers many advantages. Failure of a single pot means little when it is one among many.

The potters' steady labor behind the wheel builds their skill and efficiency. They find increased ease in executing their ideas. Moreover, the volume of work—which invites potters to throw similar pieces at one sitting—fuels their creativity. A board full of mugs means trying out one idea, and then its many variations.

The production potter's focus on the customer has benefits, too. Meet Sarah Gamble. My first summer was Gamble's third. At that time, she was second in seniority to Keeland. Gamble came to SDC with two years of clay experience and a history degree from Fontbonne University in St. Louis. While she was not yet making the really big pots like Keeland, she made bunches of everything else. With her high daily output year round, pots marked "Sarah" or "Gamble" overwhelmed the gallery. Her then-fiancé, now-husband, John Gamble worked across the park at the furniture factory, and SDC seemed to be a good match for them while they began arranging their future together. SDC offered a steady income in their crafts, with benefits. Gamble appreciates that work in a pottery like SDC means she creates pieces someone can pick out, use, and enjoy.

I like the idea of people buying a coffee cup and taking it home and using it rather than having some piece of art that sits at home on the shelf. I like that. (Gamble 2002a)

Gamble's example underlines two positive outcomes of production potters' interest in their customers. First, the production potters' savvy for making pots that sell and that re-coop or supersede the potters' investment of materials, overhead, and labor means that pottery-making serves as a workable livelihood. Second, making pots that the customers will not just look at, but use, makes functional pottery increasingly meaningful for both the potters and their clients.

Yet as readily as the potters point to the benefits of production work, they also name concerns. The shop's focus on maintaining a high level of production and on satisfying the tastes and interests of customers can make it difficult for the potters to maintain other goals important to them. The potters want to promote their own creativity, produce individual work, and make work that shows their engagement with the larger ceramics community. I elaborate these goals in the next chapter. Let us proceed now by highlighting how production work may threaten these ideals.

First, creativity: In many potters' eyes, production can dull creativity. While experience in production points to a fostering of creativity, as argued earlier, general talk among studio potters always

suggests otherwise. The pressure to produce many items often means the potter repeats designs again and again. This repetition, of course, is a practical way to meet demand. As Bryan Keeland described, if a potter wants to make a living making pottery, he has to make designs people want to buy, and he has to think about the time each piece takes, which often equals repetition of designs:

A lot of the people in the colleges and the universities, they have a job, you know. Their job is teaching at the schools, so that's where most of



Illustration 19: Sarah Gamble straining glaze through a sieve

their money comes from. They have more time to make, quote-unquote, “art,” one-of-a-kind pieces and stuff like that, which would be ideal. Because when you are making pottery for a living, you don’t always get to make what you want to make. Most of the time, you don’t. (Keeland 2002A)

Production can mean the potters may not feel as free to experiment, to mess up and take risks trying new ideas, because they need to meet the shop’s production goals and because they want to supply designs they know will sell. Working in front of an audience complicates the issue further. Katherine Chandler found that because she always did her wheel work in front of an audience, she was even more likely to make the forms with which she felt most comfortable, those she had practiced the most. Confronted with these concerns, the production potter does tend toward repetition. And while some say that repetition can foster creativity, others argue that it dulls it. Some potters find that when making a bunch of pieces at one time, their minds start to wander. The work becomes second nature; the potter stops focusing on how to improve, sticking with old habits or designs that need improvement. Plus, repeating designs takes time away from producing new work. All of these concerns go against the argument that repetition will assist the potter’s creativity.

Meet John Tygart. John Tygart worked at SDC for five years in the early eighties. He left when his independent pottery at home brought in enough money to match what he could make at SDC. As a studio artist, Tygart creates humorous, satirical sculpture for gardens, and duplicates the pieces by slip casting them to sell to gallery clients. When Tygart read through some of my early writing, he stumbled over the idea of repetitive work fostering creativity:

One part that struck me that is kind of different is the whole idea that “repetition breeds creativity.” That, I think, is just bunk. That breeds

boring more than creativity. Once you refine your idea, and you have it refined, and you keep beating on it and beating on it, no matter how much you repeat that process, you have already solved that problem. Go on to the next one. But all it does is reinforce technique, and technique is not creativity. Technique is just a skill. . . . I think, when you have creativity, creativity is what you bring to it: your questions, and your solutions to your questions. That is the creative part. Nothing makes creativity. Creativity is something that you bring to it yourself. That is probably why you are in the business, because you have all of these creative questions to begin with that you are trying to work out in your own style and [if you choose] clay to create solutions to your questions. . . . When you are a kitchen potter [when you are just making dishes, bowls], your main questions that you are working out there are questions: “Will this drain if I pour water in it?” “Is it a colander?” You are working on functional questions. (Tygart 2004)

In summary, the production potter feels pressure to maintain a high level of production, to limit labor time given to each piece, to make what people will buy, and to not stumble along the way, particularly in front of an audience. Repeating well-rehearsed designs can be the answer, but it can also draw the potter’s focus away from improvement. And while repetition does improve technique, some argue that it takes time away from creating new work, and as Tygart explains, many potters enter the business because they want to exercise their creativity. To him, that means asking creative questions, finding solutions, and then asking new ones—not repetition.

Second, individuality: Many potters contend that the production mode compromises the individuality of their work. While the shop allows the potters to use their own designs, the group effort to get production done promotes some recycling of designs among the group. All the potters take turns making the shop’s high-selling items; consequently, a shop design for these goods has emerged and evolves as the potters each take a turn making jack o’ lanterns, the famed SDC doily

pie plate, and the gently curved mug seen often in the shop. The potters also replicate other successful designs, particularly when they sell well. Even with the borrowings, of course, the potters find ways to add their own design twists. For example, they constantly invent new ways to carve the jack o' lantern's quintessential eyes, mouth, and nose—little pushes to maintain the individuality of their work.

Production potters' understanding of customer tastes may also compromise individuality by precluding some of their own potential work. If the potters' ideas about what Ms. Checkbook will buy do not match what they like themselves, then they may sacrifice their own ideas and stick to making pieces they know will sell.

Third, engaging the ideas of other ceramic artists: Production potters' interest in customer tastes complicates their involvement in greater ceramic movements. Whenever they discussed their work, the SDC potters showed their strong awareness of the relationship between their pots and those of other ceramic artists. As the chapter "Apprentice" described, they often looked to outside artists for ideas and inspiration; they would try out others' techniques, and then build on them. This ability to dialogue in clay with other artists adds to the vitality of the craft. Yet the SDC potters expressed concerns that engaging any of a number of contemporary trends among ceramicists might not interest their customers.

I listened carefully for the potters' concerns about production work. I listened for the specific ways that a push to produce and an interest in customers could compromise other goals, goals that appealed to me as well: imagination, individuality, and dialogue with a community of ceramicists. Then I begin to see how

the potters had found ways to alleviate their concerns about production work by blending their role as production potters with that as studio potters. Nelson pointed to how one role supports the next:

You have to be a production potter in order to be a studio artist 'cause you've got to have the things that pay the bills, and once you get to the point where you are recognized, then you can start selling more of your artistic endeavors and less of your mugs and bowls. Not to say that your mugs and bowls still aren't going to pay the bills, because they are. Instead of charging ten dollars for your mug, your mug is now probably twenty bucks. You know the hard reality is that you've got to make a living somehow. That is the hard reality, and production makes the living. (Nelson 2002)

To think of oneself as a production potter highlights the potter's goal to produce and to cater to a customer base. To think of oneself as a studio potter emphasizes the potter's interest in creativeness, in uniqueness, and in communication with other artists. At SDC, the potters find ways to blend these roles, enjoying benefits of both. The next chapter shows how the SDC potters adopt the role of the studio potter, and in doing so, give themselves some leeway in their work schedule to ramp up their creativity, to pursue their "own work," and to negotiate a compromise between Ms. Checkbook's aesthetic and their own.

Chapter IV

STUDIO POTTER

I considered myself a studio potter even though I worked for Silver Dollar City. (Nelson 2004)

Before moving to the glass shop, Todd Nelson worked sixteen-years in the SDC pottery as both potter and as the shop lead.

Looking back on his career at the pottery offers insights into how SDC potters promote studio values inside a production setting. At SDC, Nelson developed his own line of work, but did so while satisfying the production, demonstration, and management responsibilities required of his post.

The potters referred to his line of work as “Nelson’s slip deco.” He created a full range of functional

wares (casseroles, dinner sets, mugs) in Anglo-Oriental forms, featuring substantial



Illustration 20: A display of Nelson's slip deco line in front of Lynch at the demonstration wheel

feet, and loosely decorated with raised, slip-trailed, impressionistic nature designs inspired by childhood trips butterfly catching (wheat, grasses, dragonflies, flowers). He layered his slip-decorated pots with sprayed on, overlapping patches of glaze (purples, blues, greens, browns), imbuing his surfaces with an added visual dimension.

Potters who worked with Nelson in the shop a decade ago remember the early stages of this work; he developed his slip deco designs over many years through his own creative exploration. Cued in to the world of ceramic art around him, Nelson drew freely on outside national and international ceramic influences. He followed the slip deco work of *Ceramics Monthly*-published John Glick; took to heart advice about impressionistic design from a special SDC workshop with the visiting potter Robin Hopper; and drew on his knowledge of Japanese and Korean brushwork. Nelson worked under the constraints of a production schedule and sometimes shared a workshop with five other potters under him; yet he maintained artistic control over his work and his space because he and his potters followed no set designs and worked only on their own pots. Nelson adapted the shop to follow his line of work; in essence, he turned it into his studio by making many of his own tools, devising and mixing up buckets of his own glazes, and filling ketchup bottles with his own heavy slips, all especially created for his designs. For Nelson, SDC remained a place where he and his potters had the opportunity to “explore their boundaries” as clay artists; they could call themselves studio potters, embracing all the title signifies.

Nelson's story illustrates many of the ways the SDC potters exemplify the approaches, accomplishments, and values of studio artists, and thus serves as a useful preface to the discussion to follow. The SDC potters could easily relate to the identity of the production potter, yet they could also see themselves as studio potters. To do so underscores another set of concerns: their desire to develop their "own work" (an idea that points not only to the individuality of their work, but also to the creative process behind it) and to make work that shows engagement with a larger community of ceramic artists. The chapter will explore how the SDC potters meet these goals. In doing so, it will show how the SDC potters see themselves in the context of current-day ceramics, where, potters value individuality and skillful utilization of ideas and ways shared by the community as a whole. The end of the chapter discusses rifts that arise when the SDC potters strive to work as both production and studio potters, by showing how the potters have confronted those conflicts, particularly as they approach the ideal of their customer base, Ms. Checkbook.

To develop their own line of work, the potters must follow each piece through the complete process and use their own designs. Many of the SDC potters looked on the work of the ceramics professor as the creative ideal. Without pressure to keep a store stocked or to make pieces that appeal to a customer base (and thus assure the potter's salary), the professor is free to turn out one-of-a-kind work, to make art rather than functional pots, and to make pieces that reflect only his or her own tastes and/or the tastes of insiders to the craft. A professor generally has full

autonomy to follow whim—or at least so it seemed to the potters who mused about this idyllic work setting.

In reality, the SDC potters have been given a great deal of control, control key to maintaining their identity as studio potters. As Lynch explained, “The studio potter usually does everything. They follow the pot from start to finish, and it becomes very individualized” (Lynch 2002b). The SDC potters do the same, within limits. They do share glazes (nearly twenty trash barrels and over a dozen pickle barrels full of shop glazes stand in lines filling the far end of the workshop), but they use no factory glazes. One of the potters from the shop takes the initiative to devise and mix up each of the glazes (either from scratch or by finding a novel way to alter a known glaze recipe); when the potter uses that glaze, it enhances the personal investment he or she has in the work. The potters also share a kiln. They fire all of their work together in a gas kiln, which means the potters only do high-fire work, limiting those who would prefer another type of fire from pursuing the work they might otherwise create. Yet while Lynch might prefer to mix up his own salt glaze recipes and wood fire his pieces, his ability to carry his pots through the process (indeed “start to finish,” if only almost) does give his work a unique, “individualized” look.

Not only do the SDC potters work only on their own pieces, they utilize their own designs. Meet apprentice Eric Neumann. Neumann joined the shop my second summer and, while only 18 years old, already had several years of experience as a potter through classes and workshops sponsored by independent studios and university ceramics departments in Kansas City. That fall, as a freshman at the Kansas City Art Institute, he would be taking art history survey

courses and “2-D Design,” but would get very little ceramics training his first year. At SDC, he had the opportunity to work full-time in clay and to continue building his throwing skills; he saw it as an added benefit that SDC was not a factory setting where he would have to throw 500 identical pieces. Neumann could make pots in his own style, which he spoke of as “flowing,” “gestural,” and “geometric.” Neumann described the shop’s leniency:

‘Bout the only requirement we have been given is that [a pot] be functional and that it sell, and that is so wide that—you know, we have basic things (that the pieces we make need to perform their function), but as to the actual form of the piece that we make, we are pretty much open to our own interpretation. And Bryan encourages that. (Neumann 2003a)

At SDC, the potters each take their own direction. They work only on their own pieces, and they freely use their own designs. As a result, the SDC potters rarely needed to turn over pieces and check for the potter’s mark to tell whose hand made what. Yet enacting their identity as studio potters goes beyond the idea of working solo. Let us consider again the idea of a potter’s “own work.” As the potters made clear to me, developing one’s “own work” implies more than just individuality; it suggests a period of



Illustration 21: Eric Neumann centering

development through which the potter may begin with one new idea—a message, a

technique, a shape, a use—and begin trying it out, developing it (excited about where such diligent exploration may lead next). Some of the potters talked about the importance of thoughtful questioning, critiquing their own pieces by considering what works, what doesn't, what it does and does not convey. A potter may work through several versions of a design over weeks, or months, or years. Ultimately, that line of work will become how other potters and customers know the artist.

At SDC, Katherine Chandler found that she too—even as an apprentice—could work towards developing her “own work,” a process she began in her university studio. In

Chandler's and my apartment that first summer, she put one of her teapots made at school on top of the TV set. It had the features of a copper oilcan put together with rivets, and boasted an extended spout. Through our interviews, I learned that the



Illustration 22: Chandler's teacans at SDC (above) and at the university (below)

teapot came out of her work at school developing pieces with industrialized features. She had seen other potters do similar work, and she wanted to continue developing their ideas. She liked how presenting industrialized features through her work in clay would allow her to voice her concern about the end of handmade things. In her studio at school she had begun looking for new ways to work the clay to give it the look of copper, tin, and leather, and to make the pieces look like they were fixed together by machine with rivets or solder. She called her teapots “teacans.” At SDC, she had the opportunity to make watering cans (part of the shop’s production list). Bryan Keeland showed her how to make watering cans like his, and although she started using his design, she soon saw it as an opportunity to continue developing her teacan ideas. This meant “transcending the pot,” she said, moving the pot beyond its strictly functional purpose (watering can) to speak a message. In doing so, she moved the piece into what she saw as the realm of art.

You know, I took advantage of what I was making with the watering cans. I took advantage of that, and I said, “Okay, I’m going to do my thing on these. It is going to be mine, my thing. It’s not going to be anyone else’s in the shop.” . . . I made half of the regular, Bryan Keeland ones, and then I made five Katherine Chandler ones. I was just excited because I like the idea of me carrying on my ideas from my ceramics classes at school and being able to exercise my imagination a little. I do exercise my imagination at the shop a little normally, but most of the time it’s production: [Snaps] “Get it finished,” “Five of them,” or, “Do ten of them that all look the same.” So, it’s probably why it took me forever to get them done. . . . Again, I liked the idea of—the pieces that were on like the spout and the two handles—I liked the idea of having them look like they are attached with something, that they are not just pressed on there, but there’s rivets, or there’s screws or bolts or whatever you take that as. It looks like that’s what’s holding it on and not just having it pressed on. You know, they are funky, and so I think somebody funky will walk in and hopefully like them. (Chandler 2002b)

Developing her teacan ideas through the shop's watering cans made the task an exercise of the imagination. When the potters think of themselves as studio potters, they point to this kind of creative process, with the potter developing an idea through many trials and thought. Chandler found new ways to use clay to juxtapose the pressures to industrialize with the continued interest in handcraft.

For Bryan Lynch, work as a studio potter meant not only developing one's own work, but also having a private workspace—a studio—that will best promote his creative process. He felt that SDC could not offer him a true studio. For him, a studio of one's own means not only that the potter pursues his own work there, at his own pace and on his own terms, but also that he controls the design and redesign of his studio to aid his process. While still at SDC, Lynch went back to apprentice with Mitch Yung, a potter who met his expectations of a studio artist. During his time with Yung, Lynch saw Yung develop and produce three distinct lines of work; he explained how Yung had tailored his shop to reflect that work. Lynch saw a clear contrast with SDC. There, while each piece came from one potter's hands and bore the signature of an individual, an anonymity about the pots tended to persist because the potters worked together so closely; the shop itself had the same kind of anonymous feel—communal equipment, communal tools. Yung, in contrast, created a space streamlined to his artistic agenda.

Prompted by Lynch's description of studio space in these terms, I quickly thought of Nelson. I began this chapter with a description of Nelson's "own work" developed at SDC, and began to see how the shop at SDC *did* feel like a studio, but like one that belonged to Nelson. Even after he had moved onto the glass shop, the

glaze buckets were still filled with many of the glazes he devised. Keeland now worked at the workstation Nelson had created for himself. Nelson's ketchup bottles of thick slip still sat in a bin on one of the worktables. When we worked, we picked up and used some of Nelson's handmade tools: horse hair brushes and hand-cut bamboo trimming sticks. We worked in what felt to me like another potter's studio.

As I have suggested above, the SDC potters pursue one of the central goals of studio potters as they provide for individuality and creative investment in every pot produced. To do so, they follow their own pieces through the entire process and utilize their own designs. This allows them each to pursue their "own work": they must begin with an idea and then explore that idea through numerous pieces until creating work that stands up to their own criticism. With each trial, they come closer to finding perfect solutions—or not. Their work may never stop evolving. As Lynch suggested, the potter's workspace—his studio—needs to aid his work's evolution in some way. Yet at SDC, the shop must meet the needs of not one but many studio potters. Perhaps it does—not because each potter molds it to reflect his or her own artistic quest, but because its wealth of supplies, machinery, and space can accommodate all.

Thinking of themselves as studio potters also highlights the SDC potters' interest in producing work in dialogue with a greater ceramics community. In exploring this goal, I needed, first, to locate this community. When I first heard the SDC potters use the term "studio potter", I realized that many of them both claimed this identity and sustained it by connecting to this larger community's media exchanges. To begin, books like those in the shop's library give the SDC potters

access to the greats of their field. As detailed earlier, they use these sources to get new ideas and to prompt experimentation (remember Lynch pulling down a book about Hamada and trying out some of his techniques). Under one of the workbenches, the potters keep a collection of over a decade of *Ceramics Monthly* and *Studio Potter* trade magazines; these give the potters yet another window to the world of ceramic art outside the shop (SDC managers later helped the potters make their way into these magazines by hiring a journalist to write and submit an article about the SDC shop to *Ceramics Monthly*). Studio potters also find connection online. When I googled Nelson, I found a few of his postings to the *Clay Art Message Board* sharing tips about glazes. The SDC potters additionally maintain ties with local clay artists. In fact, as Lynch discovered and took as his cue, many local potters have spent some part of their careers working in the shop; as I learned through my visits to other local potters, even those who had not chosen to work at SDC knew its potters and their work well. Once a year, many potters in the area, often including several from SDC, join together for a community raku firing at L&R Specialties, the state's main clay supplier. Then, each summer, when the shop takes on several new apprentices, the SDC potters enjoy the community-expanding benefits of potter turnover; all of the potters that come through the shop—often hailing from diverse mid-west ceramics programs—add to the shop's web of connections to the ceramics world at large. SDC even pays for a group of its potters to travel to attend the NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) conference each year. There, Nelson could see clearly how the work at SDC compares with that of studio potters nationally:

It amazes me when we go to national conventions because there are these big names there, and I'll always think of myself as just the little Silver Dollar City potter, you know. And, man, we do some good work down there. We do work there that anyone could be proud of—anyone—and really no recognition for it. (Nelson 2002)

The SDC potters have multiple means to reach out to studio potters outside their imaginary city. The existence of a community of studio potters means that not only do they adopt and share common knowledge about ceramics, but that this knowledge, in turn, grounds their evaluation and appreciation of each other's work. Studio potters share knowledge because they read the same publications, attend similar ceramics programs, and see each other's work. My discussions with SDC potters revealed three discrete domains of such knowledge: interest in (and knowledge) about the work of accomplished ceramics contemporaries (like those featured in *Ceramics Monthly*); interest in the diversity of world clay traditions (part of any ceramics training program); and interest in advanced ceramic processes (the intricacies of glaze and clay body chemistries and building and firing kilns).

First, the SDC potters often demonstrate their knowledge and interest in accomplished ceramic contemporaries. For instance, they reference their work through the shop library of books and trade magazines. As mentioned previously, Todd Nelson built on John Glick's ideas when he created his own line of slip-decorated pots; apprentices still read the Ken Ferguson quote stapled to the wall about the progression of a potter's training; and the potters still invoke their multi-day workshop at the park with internationally-acclaimed Robin Hopper.

Second, in talking about their pots and those of their workmates, the potters showed their knowledge of world ceramics influences by pointing to elements of pots

that, to them, were distinctly “Korean,” “Japanese,” “Sung Dynasty,” or simply “Asian.” Potters Katherine Chandler,

Bryan Lynch, and Eric Neumann were learning about these traditions in their ceramics courses, and saw how they could utilize these traditions’ glazes, firing techniques, and shapes. For another pot in his show-and-tell discussions with me, Lynch picked out one of Nelson’s tea bowls that had been inspired by the utensils of a Japanese tea ceremony. He explained that when Nelson threw it, he began in the usual way by centering, and



Illustration 23: Nelson’s teabowl

then opening up the clay and forming a low thick wall. But then Nelson jabbed at it with a finger before continuing to bring up the walls. That disturbance, Lynch explained, gave the tea bowl its ruffled—unexpected—lip, an imperfection key to the aesthetic of traditional tea wares. One summer, Nelson even ordered a Japanese tea set for the potters to perform a tea ceremony each day; the shop took great interest in the tradition and started making their own tea bowls.

Third, in their discussions about pots, the potters often showed their deep knowledge of ceramic processes and great appreciation for pots that display mastery of these skills. As examples, they might notice the color of a glaze as a signal that the potter achieved the proper reduction during the fire or might enjoy the

thinness and evenness of a pot's walls as indication of a potter's expertise at the wheel. The SDC potters demonstrate their advanced ceramic skills by taking time to devise their own clay and glaze recipes and by manually high firing their pieces.

Flipping through any ceramic trade magazine or book, attending any ceramic conference, or joining any university ceramics program reiterates the importance of these three streams of knowledge to the work life and conversation among studio potters. When the SDC potters seek out this knowledge and then utilize it in their work or in their discussion of pottery making, they further cement their identity as studio potters and their connection with this community.

While at the shop, I quickly learned about "potters' glazes," a group of glazes that potters appreciate, but customers little understand. "Potters' glazes" serve as an excellent example of how these three streams of knowledge not only shape how studio potters read their work, but also often shape their favored aesthetic.

The shop's standard glazes include blues, greens, purples, and yellows (all colors that sell well); the potter's also keep another palette of colors on hand that the untrained eye might describe as browns or neutrals. The first group of glazes will cover a whole pot evenly and give it a shiny finish; the second group will cover the pot but allow its surface texture to come through. The first group performs with consistency. The second group, when fired, often surprises. These glazes, post-fire, often have imperfections, speckles, and crackles, and may change in color over certain sections of the piece.

This second group of glazes has earned the title "potters' glazes." Several SDC potters spoke with appreciation about how these glazes often let a pot's texture

come through and about how they have a spontaneous quality as well as a subtle color that will not overshadow a pot's form. Depending on the exact conditions of the fire, "potters' glazes" display a wide range of outcomes. Speckling, for instance, likely indicates carbon trapped in molten glaze during a reduction fire; the potter probably took great pains in timing his fire to achieve precisely this effect. The SDC potters make it clear that "potters' glazes" got their name because many potters—studio potters—appreciate and use them. Currently, for example, many studio potters are experimenting with shino glazes, adding more and more carbon-rich ash to their recipes to

enhance the
glaze's "carbon
trapping" effects
(Davis 2002). In
doing so, they
follow in the
footsteps of the
shino's most-
published
advocate, the self-



Illustration 24: Glaze effects

described "Shino Warrior" Malcolm Davis (Davis 2003). Conference and web-based discussion about shinos and "carbon-trapping" abound.

Chandler, too, joined the shino movement. She told me that she herself did not like to use the brighter hues, the greens, or the "Country Blue" glazes. She

preferred the more “subtle colors,” those “potters’ glazes,” like shinos; she liked their effects and knew she joined other potters, like Davis, in her choice (Chandler 2002a):

Every potter has a shino glaze or has used a shino or a temmoku or an ash. They are much more spontaneous; they will do different things every time. They do these interesting little things that aren’t perfect. They will do these weird little things, and I think that is what makes a piece of pottery really special, because it is totally different. One shino can turn all black and have beautiful carbon trappings, and the next can get really speckly and have these nice gold speckles on it and a little bit of carbon trappings. And I think that is what makes a pot special is because they may look the same, but they are totally different now. (Chandler 2003)

The SDC potters say first that studio potters like “potters’ glazes” because of their spontaneity and subtlety. Chandler adds a few other reasons pointing to the three streams of knowledge already addressed. First, she noted that many of these glazes come from Eastern traditions, traditions that are often part of a university student’s training and that provide a continuing source of inspiration throughout a potter’s career. Secondly, she said, because the greats of the ceramics world featured at conferences, and in the trade magazines and ceramics textbooks, use these glazes, others want to follow:

The reason why we like those glazes, like the kaki and the shino . . . [is that] the big potters like Hamada and Voulkus and Leedy and all of these dudes who are huge in potter history—because that’s what they used. (Chandler 2004)

Third, in noting her interest in how the shino performed during a fire, Chandler signals her interest in ceramic processes.

Eric Neumann spoke also of this attraction. He described how studio potters appreciate glazes like shinos because, in a finished shino-glazed pot, they see the

potter's ability to draw particular nuances of color or consistency from the glaze. Yet customers rarely read the glaze this way, as Neumann describes:

Shinos: you can get so much variation with the type of glaze that is a shino, but because it is just this brown color, people just walk right by it because it doesn't jump out and grab their attention. Whereas potters are like, "Oh!" There are so many subtleties that can be achieved in a shino because it is such a finicky glaze. . . . Unless you are a potter, you don't appreciate the work that goes into getting a good shino. (Neumann 2003a)

Studio potters' expert knowledge of the greats of their field, of the varied ceramic traditions throughout the world, and of the intricacies of technical knowledge—wheel to fire—required of their craft allows them to read "potters' glazes" as insiders. This knowledge also provides an impetus for the adoption and use and (often) reinvention of these glazes. Although these three streams of knowledge came across during many of my discussions with the potters, they nonetheless remained divided about the existence of a single, central aesthetic among studio potters.

For Bryan Lynch, to work as a studio potter means following a very specific aesthetic. Lynch worked nights for Mitch Yung, for an extra wage and for studio space to work on some of his own pieces. In return, he and a few other potters helped produce Yung's designs. Lynch used the quiet studio space and long evening hours to work slowly and carefully towards developing his own designs. He wanted to create pieces that he might later use to get into graduate school. In his mind, they had to be outstanding. As he began to think more about what his own pots might look like, he saw new limits in his work at SDC. The pots he imagined making would require a lot of time and, thus, not suit SDC. Moreover, SDC did not

offer the glazes or kiln that he needed. Lynch wanted to make “modern pots.” To him, work as a studio potter dictated not only the kinds of shapes (loose, altered),



Illustration 25: Lynch with his work-in-progress at Yung's studio

but also the kinds of glazes (potters' glazes) and firing (wood). Lynch wanted to make chunky, substantial, “sculptural pots,” which meant taking the time to alter pots, maybe squaring them to move them away from the round shapes that bespeak their wheel-thrown origin. He wanted to add hand-built feet to the bottoms, or at least to return the pots to the wheel to trim in foot rings. He wanted to make “loose” pots that projected movement in their “muffled edges” and askew shapes. Further, he wanted to work with salt glazes and a wood fire—hallmarks, he believed, of the most contemporary ceramic

movement. When I began to look for these kinds of pots in trade magazine like *Ceramics Monthly*, I found that the work he described filled their pages.

While Bryan Lynch sees himself and other studio potters as joining together in a focused, modern ceramic movement, Bryan Keeland contends that studio potters are only stretching the boundaries of ceramic art; he notices a “branching out” to embrace a wider range of techniques and styles. Dedicated potters come up with new glazes and clay bodies and seek out new influences, new audiences, and new messages:

I don't know that in functional art that there is one organized movement in one direction. It just seems like we keep branching out in many directions; it keeps getting more diverse and less narrow-minded.
(Keeland 2003)

These two opinions provide an interesting counterpoint. On the one hand, as one flips through the pages of a studio potter trade magazine, some aesthetics do stand out as the most *en vogue* (e.g., as Lynch suggests, for wood fired, loose, or altered pots). On the other hand, the same trade magazine shows that a number of divergent aesthetics compete for attention. Ultimately, studio potters draw freely from a wide range of influences.

I saw that potters at SDC find inspiration in their personal experiences and from other arts. Todd Nelson found inspiration in his memories. Taking a thick slip to greenware pots, Nelson sketched out butterflies and flowers remembered from boyhood trips to a local meadow with net in hand. Bryan Keeland found inspiration in the arts and crafts of the art nouveau period. As he recalled, one of the other potters in the shop brought in a book about art nouveau. The time put into craftsmanship and the beauty of the designs impressed him. He found more books

about the period, including studies of art nouveau ironwork and furniture making and the paintings of Alphonse Mucha. He learned that to create the early highly ornate art nouveau work, the craftsmen would spend “hours and hours and hours and hours” on any one piece.

He told me, “The craftsmanship that goes into those pieces is just phenomenal. You just don’t see that anymore. Very rarely do you ever see that much skill and



Illustration 26: Keeland's curvaceous teapots

time put into a single piece” (2002b). At first, Keeland wanted to find a way to bring art nouveau elements into his decoration, but then he realized that the shapes of the pots themselves had already begun to reflect the aesthetic:

The curves flow together; I mean, everything is very curvilinear like the art nouveau period. . . . Everything is very, very curvaceous and ornate and very decorative, and it just has a flow about it, and that is what I like to try to impart into my pot. Everything just works together. (2002b)

Here both Nelson and Keeland have continued to build on a process they began as apprentices. By looking out (to nature, to furniture making, and beyond) they find inspiration to further develop their own aesthetic.

The SDC potters’ success as both production and studio potters ultimately lies in their ability to balance these varied goals. To be production potters they must value a high and cost-meeting output as well as make pots suited to their customer

base. To be studio potters they must exercise creativity, maintain individuality, and produce pots that show their engagement with a community of other studio artists. The SDC potters must negotiate between these goals as they perform for their client: Ms. Checkbook. Within this performance, the rifts between the roles become most evident.

In their vision of themselves as studio potters, the potters at SDC shared their concern that if they were to fully embrace this role, they might compromise their ability to appeal to their customers at SDC. In their eyes, a “true” studio potter makes pots that always strive to challenge and surpass previous designs and that show an engagement with the ideas of other studio potters. Because of their insider knowledge, other studio potters would be best equipped to appreciate the potter’s work (although studio potters do have a knowledgeable clientele who enjoy and support their work and who share some understanding of its artistic production). However, SDC potters fear that this kind of approach would alienate the park customer who appreciates their pots from a vantage point far removed from the studio potter’s world. For Lynch, the time-intensive pots he made after hours in Yung’s shop would get him into grad school, but pouring so much time into them made them completely “unmarketable” because his pots’ retail value could not recoup the cost of his lengthy work time. Furthermore, he believed that the pots’ look too would make them undesirable. In his mind, customers do not like “potter’s glazes.” They do not like the kind of surface texture these glazes and fires allow. As Lynch saw it, people at SDC are not looking for “modern” pots; they like the look of the strictly functional shapes and glazes that fill the shop.

Why would Ms. Checkbook just pass up a pot in temmoku because it looks brown? Why would she view a pot in a thin glaze that still shows some of its surface texture as flawed? I began to ask myself, why would she not? Studio potters appreciate these pots—those in temmoku and those with sculptural texture—because they know more about pottery history, ceramic processes, and because they view pots in relationship to what other studio potters produce. I began to think that Ms. Checkbook's aesthetic cannot be any more right or wrong, but it will be different and based on a different list of concerns. I discussed my hypothesis with Sarah Gamble who replied:

I hadn't thought about it like that, but that's true. Because, yeah, we have all of this, and we see all these pots, and we know what it means and the history behind it. And for [Ms. Checkbook], she's just looking at, "I want these couple of mugs," and, "Do they go with the dishes I already have?" you know. And there is nothing wrong with that. Everybody makes color choices and aesthetic choices and stuff like that. (Gamble 2004)

I also discussed my theory with Todd Nelson, pointing to the gap between the studio potter's and Ms. Checkbook's experience and knowledge. He suggested that the potter has the responsibility as a salesman to close that gap. If he wanted to make pots in shinos, temmokus, and the rest, if he wanted to alter the pots in ways unfamiliar to Ms. Checkbook, he would have to be there to explain the thinking behind the work, to offer her an explanation about why he liked the pots, and why she should too:

The people that come here, (1) they are going to buy a piece because we sell a lot of stuff just because they saw us make it. But I think that 90% of the women that come to this place that buy are decorating. They are using it as a home decorating tool. So they are coming here, and they don't want a brown vase to sit in their cupboard. They want something that is going to be complementary to what their environment

is. Now, on the other hand, if you can get a customer, and you can sit down and talk to them one-on-one, if you sell them, if you sell them a shino or a carbon trap or a temmoku or a copper red, and you explain it to them, and you sell it to them. . . . And if you get Ms. Checkbook, and sit down with her, and say, “Okay, look at this. This vase has this rich luster, and you look beyond the surface, and you see the depth of color,” then you can sell it to them. (Nelson 2003)

Nelson presents a solution here. The potter can make pots that lie outside of Ms. Checkbooks’ aesthetic, pots that instead express a studio potters’ aesthetic, but the potter must then take the time to open a dialogue with his client and invite her to understand his own thinking.

The SDC potters also find usefulness in compromise, crafting pots that are themselves a bridge between their own aesthetic and that believed held by Ms. Checkbook. The shop glazes offer a prime example. As I learned about “potter’s glazes” and their appeal, I began to notice how even though the shop’s palette of customer-friendly colors may include blues and purples, some of the features of a shino (its carbon trapping) and of the other potters’ glazes (their color changes and tendency to break easily over surface changes) still show up in the shop’s colorful glazes. In a conversation with Kingsbury, she pinpointed what the potters had tried to work into their glazes: a subtlety.

You have to keep in mind that [Ms. Checkbook] likes bright colors, and, I mean, it is not hard for me because I like bright colors. But if you like browns and shinos and temmokus and black and greens, [Ms. Checkbook] is not going to love you. So you work with the bright colors, and you find the subtlety in the bright colors, ‘cause that is what you are enjoying about brown and green and shino is the subtlety that you can get out of it. (Kingsbury 2003b)

As Kingsbury describes, the shop's glazes have qualities that appeal to both the potters and their customers, not dependent on sharing the same aesthetic.

In conclusion, the potters at SDC have found a way to blend their roles as production and studio potters. Towards the first, they maintain the high level of production needed to meet customer demand and tastes for pottery. Yet, the potters do this while meeting a second set of goals, those of the studio potter, as this chapter has outlined. The SDC potters maintain their individuality, find space to think creatively and to develop their own work, and keep in touch with the pottery world at large. The potters know at what point their juggling of roles equals success when the pots they make become "pots that sell." Yet as Nelson suggests in finding need to open a dialogue with Ms. Checkbook, the SDC potters' role as crafts demonstrators, discussed in the next chapter, may give the potters the best footing to combine these divergent roles. When meeting their customers face to face, the potters have a chance to help others understand their aesthetic and, in doing so, to sell themselves and their pots.

Chapter V

CRAFTS DEMONSTRATOR

I give demonstrations. Just try to be as personal as you can. Tell them about yourself and your history with pottery and how that happened because they don't care what you really tell them. But what attracts them to buying your work is to give them a little bit of yourself because they are buying a piece as much to have a tiny portion of you, as they are any other reason. And the fact that they get to sit and talk to you accentuates that. (Neef 2002)

During my trips to SDC as a little girl, I might have seen Frank Neef at the demonstration wheel and taken away a pot and a memory of him just as he describes above. Neef worked at SDC for five years during the eighties and now works independently making a line of intricately carved vases in crystalline glazes. Neef came from Missouri State's theater program. He felt that the park managers liked that he was an actor and could give good demonstrations, even more than the fact that he could also make great pots.

The SDC potters' role as crafts demonstrators sets their work apart from those potters outside the park who rarely have a chance to perform their craft for customers. At SDC, all work is demo work. The potters throw every pot at the demonstration wheel at the end of the gallery during two hour-long time slots and only do finish work downstairs out of guests' view. As this chapter will show, the SDC potters view the role of crafts demonstration in a variety of ways. Several see this role much as Neef depicts. For these potters, demonstrations serve as an

effective way to make the connection with customers that will motivate many to buy their work. Some potters note the importance of crafts demonstration to promoting the park's 1880s heritage production. To others, particularly to those first hired by the park, demonstration has served as a visionary enactment that promotes the message that an alternative to modernism persists. The chapter will conclude with the potters' demonstration how-to.

The role of crafts demonstrator allows the potter to make a connection with park guests that will enhance the meaning of the pots in their customer's eyes. As discussed below, this exchange allows customers to find new meaning in the pots because the interaction lets the potter share knowledge not easily portrayed through the vessels on their own. Also, the customer meets the potters behind the pots, allowing a mug or bowl to become a means to carry away both a functional piece of art and a memento of the artist.

First, at the demonstration wheel, the potter displays the skill behind the work. Throwing mastery comes through as the potter



Illustration 27: Lynch at the demonstration wheel

gracefully pulls up the walls. Watching the small deft movements that bring a form ever closer to its final proportions between the foot, belly, and neck provides the needed visual experience to appreciate a pot's hidden movement in now twice-fired stoneware. SDC customers never watch the potter mix glazes or use them, but the at-once colorful, yet sometimes-unexpected, glaze finishes that fill the gallery become a topic of discussion between potter and customer across the demonstration area railing. More commonly, the potters speak to their audience about their immediate work at the wheel. They may speak about why they wheel wedge the clay first to homogenize the clay and avoid any air pockets that may cause problems in the fire. Or, as they throw, they may discuss the aesthetic choices made along the way, like deciding to leave the ridges made by the potter's fingers to catch puddles of glaze, or about the practical concerns that motivate the potter to round out the lip carefully for ease of use. As the customer watches and listens, a window opens up into the potter's perspective and aesthetic. As the previous chapter suggests, the rift between Ms. Checkbook's tastes and her potter's may begin to close.

Secondly, the role of crafts demonstrator connects a pot with the experience of meeting its craftsman. Other buying experiences rarely offer this, as Frank Neef describes:

They can go to Wal-Mart and get a mug for a dollar and a half, not fourteen dollars like it costs at the City, and it will drink just as well. But it wasn't made by hand. They don't have the identity, identifying with the person that made it. I firmly believe today, even still, that's why people buy handmade items; 'cause there are just few things in the world that are made by a single person from start to finish. A single person takes the pride and injects some of his personal integrity into the construction of it, and they have that amount of time of that

person's life when they purchase the item. And that's part of the attraction of buying handmade arts and crafts. (2002)

At SDC, rather than at Walmart, customers connect the names scrawled on the bottom of pots with the faces behind the demonstration wheel. They can choose to buy pots by artists they have seen in performance and even engaged in conversation. As Neef suggests, for many customers this may be the most desirable feature of the transaction.

To summarize, the crafts demonstrator uses the demonstration platform to help park visitors better understand both the skill and artistic perspective behind their work. The demonstrations also allow the potter to show the personal investment in each pot as well as to forge a brief, but meaningful relationship with guests that will further personalize a customer's purchase. However, at SDC, where the park's theme takes guests back to another time, the role of crafts demonstrator helps fulfill another important goal, that of joining in the park's 1880s Ozarks heritage production.

When the potters step before park visitors as crafts demonstrators, they take an active role in shaping SDC's heritage production. For some, this process begins with scene setting. Park designers hide most anachronisms and "theme" the physical space by filling it with objects that add "charm" and that meet guests' expectations of what an Ozark-past should be. The total impact must be an "atmosphere" that allows for guests' imaginative transport to another time and place. This section will elaborate these points as well as show how SDC fits the heritage production model, through which objects, traditions, and sensibilities—long out-of-vogue—find new currency as exhibits of themselves. Heritage-making comes

through in the potters' costuming, shop design, production methods, and in the pots themselves.

From the perspective of Sue Noel, the park's theming coordinator, the potters and all staff at SDC find themselves in something like a movie. Because of this dramatic aspect of the park, Noel believes the creation begins with the right set. As she notes, guests moving about the park should feel transported to another time, and the staff must do its best not spoil that feeling:

If you were watching "Little House on the Prairie," and Laura walked across the field in tennis shoes, it has pretty much destroyed the whole vision of what the T.V. show was trying to depict. And it is the same out here. So everybody needs to be really conscious of what they do, what they say, how they dress—because we are doing this for our guest. And in some sense we are in a movie, and I think once you have reached that, really, a point of no return when a guest can stand around and look around and really not see anything out of theme, I think that that feeling is just there from a guest's standpoint. (Noel 2002)

Noel's staff plays a key role in establishing the physical space that strives to bring guests to, as she says here, "a point of no return."

Of the park's construction process, Noel explains that the corporate design office leads the scene-making, overseeing all major changes to the look of the park. But while this office plans new rides and other large building projects (all to promote the park's 1880s Ozarks theme), Noel and her staff, the "Maintenance and Construction" team, build many of these planned structures and then see after the details of the park's look. They build old-time cargo boxes and other clever cover-ups that hide electric meters and other anachronisms from guests' view. Noel designs and her crew builds and paints signs with old-time lettering and pictures to mark a new ride entrance or to commemorate a longtime employee. When the Food

Division wanted to start selling pretzels near the train depot, for example, Noel oversaw the construction of a concessions cart that looks like an old-time freight car. She searches antique shops to find objects like old furniture, kitchen utensils, and farm equipment to furnish the shops and decorate the grounds to take care of the finishing touches that add, as she says, “charm” to each space. As a rule of thumb, Noel says that anything pre-1920s works, pointing out that her goal is not authenticity, but rather a perception of pastness.

According to Sociologist Erik Cohen (1988), visitors to Silver Dollar City may still view their experience as “authentic” because they approach the park

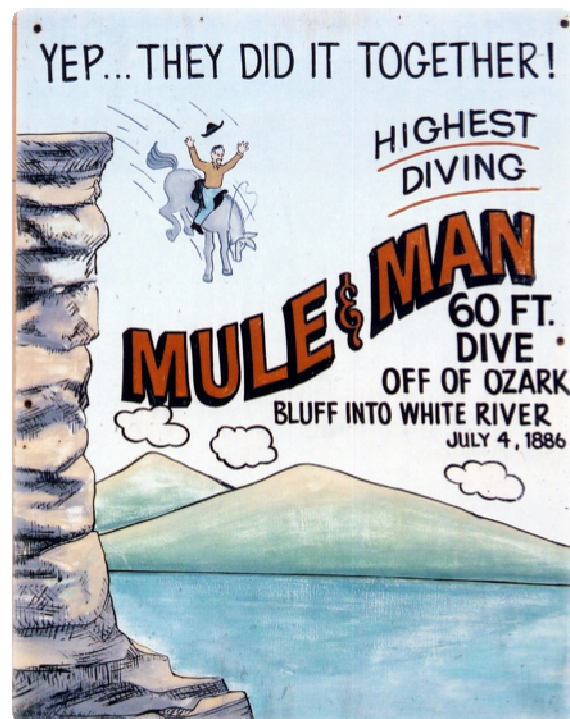


Illustration 28: Park signs

as what he calls “recreational tourists” (377). Unlike sociologists and academics from related fields, who often insist that authentic practices must be by and for a culture’s own group, “recreational tourists,” seeking in part to relax, will approach a cultural product with greater flexibility. They have the willingness to “make-believe” and to accept something as authentic if it has at least some characteristics of the intended cultural product (379). Thus the park’s scene-making, and the potters and staff themselves, must provide just enough staging to produce what Terry Bloodworth calls “atmosphere.”

Terry Bloodworth, while still a university theater student, joined SDC’s performing street troupe in the late sixties, the park’s humbler years, long before rollercoasters and the other trappings of the modern theme park. The group kept the park guests entertained by acting out the Hatfield/McCoy family rivalry on the square and by offering other skits throughout the day. Bloodworth later transitioned to work as a SDC glassblower and stayed at the park for over three decades. As an actor, Bloodworth evaluated the park in terms of its ability to engage and transport visitors to another time:

“Atmosphere” was supposed to be the creation of a total environment in which you didn’t think about the fact that you had driven here in an automobile. You really felt like you had stepped back in time, that it really was eighteen-eighty-one, and that you really were in the Ozarks. And my feeling always was, if you squinted just a little bit, you could believe it. Sure you walked into an air-conditioned building. Sure, there was ice water and things like that. But if you walked out and just looked around, you said, “This was the way it really must have looked,” (given a little Kentucky windage in there, you know, for the fact that you have to make allowances). I remember walking across the street the first time and thinking, “This is exactly.” (Terry Bloodworth 2002)



Illustration 29: Tree-lined park path

Bloodworth here focuses not on the need for an accurate portrayal of the past, but on the quality of the visitor's experience, a central goal of many museums today as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes within her discussion of

heritage productions in *Destination Culture* (1998, 138).

In this text, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses several types of heritage productions, including museums on or near the sites they interpret and heritage corridors of commercially linked sites; she also alludes to full-scale theme parks (131-135). She defines a heritage production as “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (149). In this statement, she emphasizes the newness of the creation as well as how much it tells, not about its subject, but about the culture of those who create and view it. SDC fits Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's model of heritage productions in several ways.

First she says, in heritage productions, “the context of display is foreign to the thing it presents” (7). As an example, she asserts that Plymouth Plantation stands as more a “museum of heritage performance practices,” like living history and presentation of objects in habitat group displays, than of its subject (190). These ethnographic practices are indeed “foreign” to their subject because they have

nothing to do with the pilgrims whatsoever. At SDC the context of display is that of corporate theme parks, a far cry from the reality of the 1880s Ozarks.

Secondly, heritage productions are a “value-added industry” offering both the “value of pastness,” where sights become like a foreign country or like time travel, and the “value of exhibition,” which turns “locations into destinations,” including locations no longer viable on their own that then become profitable as exhibits of themselves (151). Some old buildings remain scattered throughout the Ozark Mountains, but little remains except the beauty of the hills to make the Ozarks a tourist destination fit to draw millions of visitors each year. A heritage production like SDC, as well as the numerous country music venues that line the strip, recall and reinvent Ozark culture and package it for commercial consumption, with the end result that this once rural and in many instances impoverished area now produces great profits.

Lastly, heritage productions are often, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls them, “virtualities,” created at the location because the actual sites do not speak well on their own (9). These virtualities have the benefit of being “high density” sites because their design keeps visitors engaged with enough to



Illustration 30: Hillcreek Pottery

see and do to stay interested for at least a full day of spending within a relatively small area (7). Guests may stay a full day or more at SDC winding through narrow pathways amidst the numerous shops, concessions, crafts shops, and rides. The park as a whole fits this model of heritage productions, as does the pottery shop itself on a smaller scale through its design, staff costumes, production methods, and the pots themselves.

The design of the pottery shop and the costumes of both the potters and staff contribute to SDC's heritage production. Noel's Maintenance and Construction staff and that of the costuming department did not make choices completely authentic to the time period, but did seek to make believable selections. For the



Illustration 31: Keeland's powder bowl displayed on an old table

pottery, Noel purchased kitchen furniture (pie safes, cupboards, dining tables) and an old stove to display pots. She wanted to add a wagon in recollection of how potters used to travel to other towns to trade their wares. The building itself, although well lit with florescent lights, does have all wood floors and heavy exposed beams running the length of the roof. A member of the retail staff, Vince Tobias, decorated the shop's displays. He would add lace, flowers, pictures from old books, potpourri, and signs with Victorian fonts to help further the shop's theme. Tobias took extra care with his costume:



Illustration 32: Vince Tobias and Lois Dugan, shop retail staff

Everybody can go out and get a shirt and jeans. Walmart carries everything that everyone wears here, practically. I guess, when I put my costume together, I wanted to show a real 1880 thing going on, not just your normal, typical everything. When people see my costume, I want them to see a character of the city, a character of the time. (Tobias 2002a)

While working at the pottery shop, Tobias wore a suit vest, a pocket watch, and, when walking the grounds, a bowler. He made specific requests at the costume shop to assemble this costume. The potters may have made their own requests, but each brought back and wore versions of the same costume: either Wrangler jeans or

Dickies overalls, and gingham or plaid button-downs with long blue aprons. The women in the retail staff all wore long calico or flowered dresses with matching lace-edged caps and aprons. The shop design and costumes create an in-situ display for the potters' work. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett might point out, the costumes and all of the objects in the shop have been "detached" from their original context and grouped together to make an argument (3). Although the designers can easily procure some things at Walmart, these objects have been selected and then brought together to show the designers' vision of what an 1880s Ozarks pottery would have been like.

When Hugo Herschend began planning the park, he included a pottery. As the published history of crafts at the park describes, a small mining village called Marmaros once stood near the park site; an early map of the town includes a pottery works, which would have produced wheel thrown, salt glazed stoneware, like that "icon of hillbilly culture," the whiskey jug (Payton 2001, 35).

The production methods used in the shop only nod to this vision as the potters use many modern techniques and processes. During high school, apprentice potter Eric Neumann worked at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival as a gypsy, and remembers how all performers were forbidden to admit they knew anything about all that happened after the year depicted. He compared this heritage production with that of SDC and saw the pottery shop as holding little to its period theme:

It is kind of funny that we are doing modern studio ceramics in a production setting that is supposed to be set back in the 1880s. And we are using all of this modern equipment, and we've given up even trying to pretend like we are back in the 1880s because obviously we wouldn't be throwing this fine white stoneware. We wouldn't be using electric motors when we throw it. We wouldn't be coming up with

these high fire cone 10 reduction glazes that can only be achieved in a gas downdraft kiln or very even-controlled temperatures. We would be throwing coarse stoneware that we dug up in the backyard, kind of refined, and ran through some really course meshes that we then fired in our own wood-fire kiln that would be classified also as like a soda kiln. We really wouldn't be using glazes. We would be using like maybe a white glaze or some kind of slip glaze, and we would be doing soda fires, wood soda fires, you know, if we were sticking to period. (Neumann 2003a)

As Neumann points out, the shop uses contemporary machinery and processes with few connections to old-time pottery making. Yet guests' ability to visit the shop any time of day and find a potter behind the wheel making pots by hand may be enough to make the shop a believable addition to the park's heritage production. Plus, while the wheel has a motor, it does have a kick wheel to help bring the motor to full speed and to stop it, a helpful reference to the fully mechanical wheel guests might anticipate.

The pots, too, often stray from the theme. The shop offers a wide variety of wares, some reminiscent of much older traditional forms, but many drawing from contemporary traditions. Lidded jars, dinner plates, and pitcher and washbasin sets recall the needs of early settlers to the area, but the absences of butter churns and jugs represent critical omissions. In their place stand a variety of forms to fill modern tastes: strawberry planters, scrub brush rests, bird feeders, jack-o'-lanterns, toothbrush holders, wine goblets, fountains, candle lanterns, and vases. Like the shops' production methods, the pots only tangentially connect with 1880s traditions, but this may do little to harm guests' appreciation of the park as heritage and much to interest them in bringing the pots home to complement their contemporary lifestyles.

As crafts demonstrators, the potters play an active role in SDC's heritage production. Like other virtualities, the park functions as a virtual Ozark town nestled in the Ozark Hills themselves. Park designers have created the sets, and employees, dressed in themed costumes, help make the site a believable, if not authentic, portrayal of the time period. Like the heritage productions Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes, SDC draws on the traditions of the past, but reinvents and presents them in a contemporary context, giving these old ways new value through their pastness and their exhibition in a high-traffic theme park. The pottery shop does its part to contribute to this process through its design, costuming, production methods, and wares.

Stepping above this basic level of involvement, some craftsmen view participation in SDC's heritage production as a principal motivation to work at the park because they see their role in the production as a platform to promote a message in which they believe deeply. The role of crafts demonstrator allows them to present the ideal, although not historically accurate, of a self-sufficient community, one where men and women know how to grow or make the things the people need and pass this knowledge down through the generations. This ideal society represents an alternative to the norms of modern life that many lament: the drifting apart of families distracted by busy schedules, T.V. watching, and consumerism; the loss of traditional craft knowledge; and the disconnect between products consumed and the acquaintance of those who produce them. When I asked SDC craftsmen to explain the appeal of this kind of idealized, close-knit village, they pointed to its perceived simplicity and ease (because of its freedom from extreme consumerism)

and to its fun (because of the joy of working with one's hands and interacting daily with a supportive community). They spoke of its ability, through SDC's reconstruction of it, to acquaint guests with their "real roots" by showing them how to do things as their ancestors once did.

Craftsman George Stiverson works at a shop on the square. He joined the park with plans to turn his novice interest in blacksmithing around the forge in his backyard into a job at SDC. Instead, he filled an opening in the cut glass shop and learned the craft at the park. I asked him to try to put a finger on how guests understand SDC:

What I hear them talk about is . . . the earlier values, simpler. They think it is a simpler way of life. It looks like more fun, you know. Course they are not living it. They are still going home in their air-conditioned cars; they are not hooking up the horses and wagons and stuff like that. . . . It's mostly the romance. The crafts: everybody talks about the crafts and wanting to see the way it was done old-timey and stuff like that. It just seems that nobody is happy where they are. I think everybody is looking for something that they think is simpler, maybe easier, more enjoyable, you know, the family all together around the table every night instead of running to games, not seeing anybody; everybody's fast-fooding it. . . . It's just, the people look back at it and think that it was so romantic and fun. (Stiverson 2003)

Stiverson suggests that many guests have a romantic vision of old-time rural societies as somehow simpler. The directness of face-to-face transactions between producers and consumers or the clarity of purpose when creating goods to provide for one's own family or for those of neighbors might contribute to this view. Park guests may view communities like these as inherently friendlier because of the close bonds required of neighbors so dependent on each other's success as craftsmen to fulfill the needs of the group.

Historian David Lowenthal offers some context for this romanticized version of history, noting that Americans often separate themselves from even the recent past, treating it like “a foreign country” that operated under an altogether different set of social rules. Rather than viewing the past as one in which they themselves might have participated and mining it for aesthetic and moral lesson to guide them today, they typically understand it only through a present-day lens. Hence, though they hold onto it as proof of their common heritage (and thus preserve its artifacts), they tend to find it of little relevance to their contemporary lives (1985).

The blacksmith Terry Bloodworth learned about the fine art of demonstration from Lloyd “Shad” Heller, a vaudevillian and a pageant performer who made an indelible mark on both SDC and Branson (Newton 1982). After moving to the Ozarks, Heller wrote and directed the first production of *Shepherd of the Hills*, in which he played the title character. At SDC, he created the character “Shad,” the City’s first mayor and its blacksmith. In those early years at SDC, Bloodworth, Heller, and the rest of the street troupe performed a variety of acts to entertain guests during their day at the park. Bloodworth also spent some time working with Heller as a blacksmith, learning the craft to then demonstrate it to guests. After his college years in the troupe, Bloodworth left the park and married, but then wanted to return to the City as a glassblower (even though he was given a chance to become a manager). He and Heller both believed that taking the time to learn and then share these crafts with guests meant finding “real roots”:

We believed in the essential story that this was a good place, and when people came to visit, they were made happier, and they were made more informed, and it centered everybody. . . . The mainstream culture and the counter-culture couldn’t agree on anything else. I had

people with whom I couldn't have had a conversation otherwise. The one thing we all agreed upon was that we all loved Silver Dollar City, and we loved the idea of older people teaching younger people to do these older things. Not that these older things even had a direct application in the world, but they had indirect applications for what you learned by creating something with your hands and then explaining that to people. . . . We bought into that completely, that multigenerational coming together to find real roots, not make-believe roots, but the real thing. And Shad's simple philosophy was the only real security in life is knowing how to do things. And we wanted to learn how to do things, if we possibly could. (2004)

Bloodworth and Heller learned their craft to share it with park guests. They used their training as actors to excel in their presentations; yet while the draw of their persona brought many to the railing to watch their craft performances, Bloodworth and Heller wanted to keep people's focus on the craft and on the exchange of traditional knowledge, seeking not to "upstage" the craft, but to bring it to life. They believed that they learned something more, not just working with their hands, but by sharing this understanding with others. With these new craft skills, they found new confidence and security in life; through their teaching, they believed they could help themselves and their audience find their roots. Bloodworth and Heller's beliefs followed the views of the counter-culture of the time, but as Heller remembers, the goal of building community and finding roots was one both the counter-culture and rural conservatives of the time could share. In the late sixties and early seventies, the *Whole Earth Catalog* brought individuals the "tools" needed—from old homesteading practices to new computer technologies—to become more self-sufficient and self-aware (Turner 2006). Publications like *Foxfire* and *Living the Good Life* helped discontent Americans get—as the movement is called—back-to-the-earth, as they sought to separate themselves from modern city ways and return

to, what they believed to be, a simpler existence (Shi 2007). For Bloodworth and Heller, SDC allowed them to actively participate in this mission.

These three goals all motivate crafts demonstration at the park. First, demonstration helps potters connect with their customers by engaging them in knowledge of the craft. Second, performance of handmade crafts plays a key role in SDC's heritage production. Third, demonstration lets guests experience the power of tradition, shared face-to-face, to make them feel rooted in a presumably common culture.

While one goal may be more important than the others to an individual craftsman, all the SDC artists tend to approach demonstration in similar ways. Some demonstrators, like Heller, have used their training as actors to create engaging demonstrations; some of these, in turn, have served as a model for others, shaping the SDC tradition of crafts demonstration. Many craftsmen have learned to use the showmanship aspects of the work (like the fire and smoke of blacksmithing) to dazzle their audiences. When demonstrating, the craftsmen often assume a character drawn from a collective performance repertoire. In terms of the knowledge shared, the demos include repeated explanations of throwing and of the technological aspects of pottery making, particularly the glazing and firing processes, yet the demonstration can also provide an opportunity for the potter to move away from the typical routine and get to know more about the customer through relaxed conversation.

I had waited until my first summer was almost over before I talked with Terry Bloodworth. I had learned about his history as an actor-turned-demonstrator and of

his closeness with Lloyd Heller since the park's early years. I had seen Bloodworth's demonstrations and understood that he himself was a gifted presenter. I knew that after more than thirty years, Bloodworth was planning to retire from SDC, and that he had a new glass shop built and waiting for him in downtown Springfield, Missouri, to begin work as an independent artisan.

Bloodworth contends that Heller created the template for craft demonstration at SDC, a kind of demonstration that was "informative and entertaining and that linked people" (2004). Heller's demonstrations drew on his skills as a performer—character development, vocal projection, and an actor's sense of timing and presentation space. In our short interview, he made me see Heller clearly:

He created a cult personality around himself. He did so unintentionally, but he was. He was an extraordinary person. He was the most physically beautiful man I've ever been around. He was a gorgeous man. He was about six one. He had shoulders out to here; a giant barrel chest; a voice that makes me sound like Tiny Tim; a beautiful beard, gold; beautiful silver hair; hanging curls; hat cocked at exactly the right angle; kitchen matches stuck in it—the bandanna in the right pocket comes from Shad—and the perfect gestures (the movement of the bandanna across the brow); the Indian tattoos on his hand, which were given to him when he was inducted into an Indian tribe in Arizona; the twinkling eyes; the little gold glasses. Everything was just perfect. He knew a costume. He knew how to put it together. He knew how to live a persona, and he was a very mediocre blacksmith. He would tell you, "I'm not a very good blacksmith, but I'm a pretty good demonstrator." "Pretty good?" He was the best ever. . . . Shad really created, for here, in my opinion, the craft demonstration as we know it (that is something that had a beginning, a middle, and an end) and created all the rules subconsciously. How you welcome people. How you bring people into what you are doing by explaining what you are going to do. How you set up your shop so that people can see everything. How you walk people through as people join you, and you bring them in ("Folks, now what we're doing, in case you folks just wandered up, what we are doing now is so-and-so"). He created consciously and subconsciously the rules. (2002)

As Bloodworth describes, Heller created a template for demonstrations because his own demos delineated a set of unspoken rules, which he himself followed closely. He costumed and carried himself in a way that clearly defined and maintained the SDC character he created: Shad, blacksmith and mayor. The way he organized his workspace made it easy for guests to view his work and understand his process. As new guests stepped up to the demonstration area, he quickly brought them up to speed. The demonstrations had a definite trajectory from beginning to end. Other craftsmen followed Heller's lead.

After Bloodworth had spoken at length about what made Heller's demonstrations a model for others, I asked him to talk me through one of Heller's demonstrations. Bloodworth stood and showed me:

He would draw a crowd by doing something like . . . he would fire up a very smoky fire (smokier than it needed to be). He would noisily lay out the tools on the anvil ("k-ling-ling-ling" over there), and then would reach in his [demonstrating Shad pulling a bandana from his back pocket], pull out [moves the bandana across his forehead], wipe his hands [wipes]. Then he'd walk over to the fence like this [demonstrating Shad's walk], and this would go back in [stuffs the imaginary bandana back in his pocket]. He would put his foot up on the top rail [foot on the chair], and he'd start telling people what he was going to do . . . in a big stentorian voice. He gave them a little bit of background. First, credibility: "This is a real shop." You establish credibility. Give them a little bit of background, and then you tell them the materials and the tools you are going to use. And then you show them what you are going to show them. Then when you are done—and you keep everything clear, physically clear, make sure sight lines are right, making sure you are projecting, making sure you are being heard—then when you are done, you show them the finished product. "Pass it around." Let all the people handle it, the heaviness of the iron, that whatever. He used the big showmanship elements of the fire, the smoke, the molten metal being poured, this sort of thing. (2002)

Bloodworth explains that Heller took the art of blacksmithing and skillfully showcased the craft. Heller knew how to create and play a vivid character, but he refused to

upstage the work itself. He wanted to engage the people in what he was doing, moving metal, and he saw the potential or the “showmanship elements” in the work itself.

Other demonstrators talked about their crafts in similar terms. When Todd Nelson worked as a potter, he saw his audience awed by the speed of his production. When he moved to the glass shop, he found his demos were often met not just with appreciative grins, but with all-out applause. I asked him why, and he quickly cited the “showmanship” of glassblowing: “Fire! Smoke! Liquid!” (2002). Bloodworth summed it up: “The sexy work always—the blacksmithing, and the glassblowing, and the pottery, the bigger stuff, the more physically imposing stuff—always gets the most press” (2002).

When asked to tell about the kind of character taken on when sitting behind the demonstration wheel, the potters describe a variety of character approaches. Frank Neef says he finds himself using a different kind of speech, making guests laugh with “jeeby county humor,” and warming them with “Ozark” friendliness, which to him best fits the theme of the park (Neef 2002):

The themed aspect was more in the way you talked and the way you dressed. . . . The friendliness of the Ozarks was really the theme that I kind of followed more than anything: you are very outgoing. You are very friendly. You are very interactive. You take the time to sit and visit with people. You are not in too big a hurry or too big a rush. That is kind of the mentality of the Ozarks. I picked that up when I first came to school down here. I used to say that people are not mentality retarded down here like most people think; they are just kind of physically retarded. They are not in that big of a hurry, and they are willing to smile, and wave, and pass the time of day with you. That was kind of my take on the theme. You can always go out of your way to assist somebody. If you were out on the park, and somebody asks you how to get to someplace, you go, “Well, you cross this bridge, and

you go down there, and you—I'll just take you there," that kind of thing.
(Neef 2002)

The craftsman's friendliness, taking the time to greet people and help them find their way around the park, supports the goal discussed previously of getting to know customers and letting them get to know the craftsman and his or her work.

Zoë Kingsbury's comments on her own character fall in line with Neef's. They both use a different kind of speech and humor. Kingsbury finds herself using words like *reckon*, *I figure*, and *ain't*, picking up on what she considers the local accent.

She puts on "a little of [the] South," too, even when "there's not an awful lot of South in Missouri" (Kingsbury 2003a).

She "down-homes" her demonstration by telling the guests, "You can come right up to the fence. I ain't bitten anybody in a week. Well, there was the one, but . . ." Or she can find a friendly, down-home way to correct the kid hanging on the fence around her demonstration area with,

"Kiddo, you fall in, we get to

keep you" (Kingsbury 2003b). As Kingsbury describes her work to guests, she often



Illustration 33: Kingsbury demonstrating

slips into that “down home” accent with, “Well, I slap it down on the wheel and poke a hole in. Spread it out. Bring it up some,” informationally the same things as she might say without the character voice (“I place the clay on the wheel. I center. I open it out”), but perhaps friendlier (Kingsbury 2003b).

Katherine Chandler departs somewhat from Neef and Kingsbury by describing her character as a “wise guy.” She remembers finally figuring the character out on the day she complained to Keeland that the guests kept asking, “Why does the wheel have to turn?” He told her, “You know what I tell them? I say, ‘Because it’s easier than running around the pot.’” Chandler thought, “Well, of course.” “Just be a wise guy about it,” she said (2004).

In shaping this character, a shared script has emerged. For guests’ frequently-asked-questions, the craftsmen often come back with what Neef called those “smart-alec pat answers.” He offered a few (2002):

Q: Where does the clay come from?

A: The clay came from out from under there.

Q: Do you know what you are going to make before you start?

A: No, I have no idea what I’m going to make.

Q: What does it do to your hands?

A: Makes them dirty.

For Neef, part of that character meant including the guests in a joke:

I found myself turning on an Ozark accent, a little thicker, a little more drawl, and you just kind of like—I don’t like to say be abusive to the people—but include them in the joke: “Where are you from?”

“Oklahoma.”

“Well, you know you can always tell an Okie; you just can’t tell ‘em much” (2002).

During the demonstration, the potters theme their performances by drawing on a variety of performance strategies. Some play into country stereotypes, subtly adding a bit of country twang to their speech and preferring hillbilly slang over precise speech. To show their friendliness, the demonstrators relax and take a slower approach to interacting with guests, taking the time to patiently listen to their questions about the pots or just about how to get around the park. Numerous guests come through the pottery on any given day to watch the demonstrations, and it follows that these visitors ask many of the same questions. Potters have built up a repertoire of clever and playful responses as well as jokes that often make fun of the guests or at least their home states. This humorous character helps make the demos entertaining and in theme. However, the character demands of demonstration do not supersede the other demonstration functions, detailed below, which can be simultaneously achieved. Demonstrators hope to share the technological aspects of their work and to bring their customers into a shared dialogue; both help fulfill the overarching goal of demonstration to make a more meaningful connection with customers and to help them better understand the potter's aesthetic.

In their demonstrations, the potters often describe their throwing process again and again, but as Kingsbury explained, demonstrations also mean engaging guests in the scientific details of the work:

I don't think that you have to dumb things down for guests. I think you can down-home them up and that they enjoy that, but I think they also enjoy hearing about our downstairs processes. I think they enjoy seeing the trimming and hearing the scientific details (especially the kids). "It turns into glass," "we use the chemicals up there," and "metals react at certain temperatures," and things like that are just as

cool as, [with an accent], “Well, Cletus . . .” We do enough of that. We are all Lyde, and Lloyd, and Lurleen, you know. It doesn’t have to be hokey to be entertaining and in theme. So, there. (Kingsbury 2003a)

She alludes to the display of elements used in various glazes that line the back wall. The guests do not watch the glazing or firing process, but the demonstrators explain them and point to their results that fill the gallery space: pots with finicky traditional glazes like chinos and celadons and more modern glazes like those in vivid and uniform hues of purple and butterscotch yellow.

Yet demonstrations can also just be a time for conversation, breaking out of “the tape rewind,” as Todd Nelson describes:

When I was in pottery, I was to the point that I was so tired of doing the tape rewind, and start over, and do it again, and again, and again, that I sat down, and I tried to have conversations. I tried to lead people into conversations so that we could talk about what I was doing, rather than, [in a wavering old man’s voice] “Ah, now, I’m centering the clay. Ah, now, I’m pushing in from the sides so it is going to go up,” you know. “You pinch it. It is going to make it move.” I got tired of that. And you know, I have had a lot better time my last year doing demos down there simply because I could talk to people instead of my rote demonstration. I could probably do my demo right now. (Nelson 2003)

Nelson breaks away from a demonstration led solely by the demonstrator. He allows his guests’ questions and interests to lead him. As the end result, he and the visitors have a better understanding of each other and have the kind of relationship which allows outsiders to better appreciate the challenges of Nelson’s work and his unique aesthetic, making his pots mean more to a potential customer than they would on their own.

SDC potters’ role of crafts demonstrator makes their work different from that of many potters outside the park. It allows them to meet their customers face-to-face, to explain their work as they show off their skill, and to unfold their individual

aesthetics. The pots cannot share many nuances of their material culture without the potter's own voice. Demonstration also allows the potters to take part in SDC's heritage production, whereby park designers pull together a variety of artifacts to construct a virtual Ozark town and to share their vision of how such a town might have operated and of what values it might lend to future generations. For some craftsmen, this role has been their central motivation. The opportunity to work at the park, learning crafts expressly to share them with guests, has fulfilled their calling to interest people in reclaiming their roots in traditional ways of procuring and making the things they need. Through the work of demonstrators over almost fifty years at the park, a tradition of SDC crafts demonstration has emerged and thrived. Many who step onto the demonstration platform find ways to become more extroverted, friendly, and humorous. Playing a character, drawn from a diverse performance repertoire, often achieves this goal; however, enlivening the performance in this way does not foreclose the demonstrators' ability to engage their guests on a more personal level. Through dialogue, the potters instruct guests about the technology of their crafts and the characteristics of their artistic aesthetic.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

As a little girl, slinking through the crowd of adults for a closer look of the demonstration, I began my study of the SDC potters. Here, standing in a gallery packed full of finished pots, the crowd watched potters begin the process, masterfully throwing bowls, plates, and mugs. Some, like me, had never seen a potter at work before. We saw the potters framed by the proscenium arch of an 1880s Ozark spectacular. As we walked the shaded paths of the city with its own blacksmith, knife maker, bread bakers, candy makers, potters, and others, we got the message that 1880s Ozark towns had an insular quality and were entirely self-sufficient. Work life then meant work with your hands. That message invited us to look past a gallery full of pots to the potters themselves.

Then I moved beyond the guest's view. I went to work at SDC both as an apprentice and as an ethnographer and folklorist. I learned that the old-time tradition onstage depends on men and women immersed in a living ceramic tradition backstage. I approached my ethnographic project collaboratively, keeping my focus on the potters' own messages about their work. My work experience and conversations with the potters helped me grapple with the complexities of their work, as did the approaches of material culture studies. At SDC, I worked among shelves stacked high with pots from every stage of the process. I learned about the culture

behind these material things, the culture that makes these pots possible and informs the meanings they have for their makers.

Each of the potters working at SDC picks out a mug to carry as part of his or her costume. They carry the mug as they move through the crowd of guests each day to and from the employee lunchroom. I picked out one of Bryan Keeland's. When I see that mug on my shelf today, it reminds me how far I have come. I see the mug now from new perspectives.

To an SDC apprentice, the mug serves as a model. The apprentices watch their boss Keeland throw the mug and a dozen others like it to observe his technique and ask for guidance. As part of his lesson at the wheel, he may stop, pick up a wire, and slice a just-thrown cylinder down the middle, bottom to top, to show his apprentices the even thickness of its walls. The apprentices make hundreds of mugs, just as Keeland did during his apprenticeship. Every mug will be an opportunity to practice and build up varied skills, even if their early attempts end up on the seconds shelf.

Keeland's mug demonstrates



Illustration 34: The author's mug by Keeland

mastery. His knowledge of clay means he has moved along Chandler's gray scale into the dark grey. As indicative of his kinesthetic skill, he easily threw two pounds of clay into a thin, high, even wall. Technically, his well-timed reduction firing gave him some interesting glaze effects—the VC/AA green boasts ample carbon trapping around the handle. Aesthetically, each part of the mug's form—the body, the gently turned-out rim, and the sweeping handle—all fit together nicely. He used a trimming stick to give the mug an elegant beveled foot—another thoughtful craftsmanship detail his apprentices might pick up and use. Creatively, he has chosen a common shop form, but added a spiral to the rim. Commercially, he has found a design customers like, one he turns out quickly to keep his work cost low. Keeland spent his apprenticeship years at the shop and now helps new apprentices, like me, find their way.

The SDC potter, taking the role of the production potter, adds to the analysis. Yes, Keeland's mug is a fine production pot, elegant, but still very quickly crafted, and one of many like it. But the repetition of this form aids sales because these mugs fly off the shelves. The production potter sees how Keeland has crafted a mug that meets all the requirements of his imagined client Ms. Checkbook. He gives her a mug in a blue-green hue with the “porch yellow” glaze inside, two popular glazes. The mug serves its function—comfortable handle, a well-rounded rim that feels right to the lips, sized so it hits the arch of nose when turned up, and microwave and dishwasher safe. The production potter also knows that making mugs like this one sustains the shop financially. Even when the need to make so

many mugs may take Keeland away from his teapots at times, his work as a production potter built up the skills that support his artistry.

The studio potter lifts up the mug, notices its light feel, immediately tries out the handle and likes the grip and the balance, notices the neatly waxed foot, wonders about the glaze composition, and smiles at the way the spots of carbon intensify around the handle joint. The studio potter quickly notes that the work comes from a highly skilled potter, yet sees that the mug indicates some of the constraints of a production setting. Keeland kept the design of his mug simple so that he could turn out many, but in doing so, he limited the variables he could creatively manipulate. He did not allow himself to alter the mugs' shape, did not take the mug back to the wheel to trim in a foot ring, and did not add on hand-built pieces. He kept the glaze simple too—one glaze poured inside, and the outside glazed with a quick dunk in the bucket. But the glazes themselves show him stretching toward new possibilities. The shop devised these glazes, taking them through many trials, and the carbon deposits in the VC/AA green speaks to current trends among studio potters obsessed with "carbon trapping." The mug shows some indication of Keeland's own style: his adherence to curvilinear and precision forms. Yet the studio potter much prefers to check out Keeland's other work—his large urns and his teapots especially, which best indicate his work progress of late.

When I began to work as a crafts demonstrator at SDC, the park gave me overalls and a gingham shirt to wear for a costume. When I lug Keeland's mug across the park, guests comment about its size. While many guests buy the official SDC plastic drink cup, I carry a ceramic mug because it fits our theme and perhaps

helps guests figure out why I wear muddy patches on the bib of my overalls. The mug becomes part of my SDC character. When guests come into the pottery shop, they understand their experience there as an extension of the park's storyline of Silver Dollar City and the 1880s Ozarks; they enter the town's pottery. In this context, the mug becomes an artifact of oldtimes, oldtimes most simply interpreted as a time before Ozarkians bought their mugs at the Wal-Mart.

When I hold my mug, I also think of Keeland at the demonstration wheel. He performs his craft grounded in the park tradition of craft demonstration. Like many other demonstrators, Keeland has cultivated "the look," keeping a beard and wearing a pair of round wire-rim glasses that bespeak the period. Because of his talent as a potter, guests like to stay and watch him. He projects total confidence and ease at the wheel. On the days he makes mugs, even the tall ones like mine, he sits down and turns out eighteen in an hour. The guests gawk at his speed. Three pulls and he has finished another one! The days he makes the large stacked urns, he really plays up the drama of his work. He stands up on the rungs of the wheel stand to get this big task done. Keeland has been working at the park since he was a teenager, so he has learned a lot from other demonstrators—how to pull off those witty comebacks, how to chat up the guests. Guests might watch his demo, maybe stay and talk with him, and then search the room for a souvenir mug marked Keeland.

After all I have learned, the mug now means much more.

At SDC, the potters join in the production of a fictional 1880s Ozarks town. The potters play along with the fiction, putting on their best "Ozark" accents and keeping up a playful banter with guests. In turn, the guests may ask enough

questions to learn something more about the potters and their backgrounds, and then may take home pots from the shop. But that interaction just scratches the surface. The real story unfolds when the potters begin to discuss their work in detail. As I learned, they see themselves as part of a community of potters that extends well outside Silver Dollar City and Branson. The ceramic tradition in which they join is not remembered, but vital and flourishing. While their tradition does connect with the early American potteries that SDC recalls, it also connects with learned and borrowed traditions from around the globe and with those that blossom on the pages of *Ceramics Monthly*. When the SDC potters make pots, they think of them as things for their clients. They also see their pots as evidence of the interaction with pots made by others, both their workmates inside SDC, and potters outside, with whom they connect through ceramics programs, local raku firings, conferences, gallery openings, books, trade magazines, and the net—an ever-widening community. This community moves ceramic tradition forward, and the dynamism of this tradition offers the SDC potters many new ideas to engage through their own work. The SDC potters' efforts to join in the dialogue of this larger community prompt them to create.

Through my work and conversations with the SDC potters, I learned not only about the many roles they fill, but also about the ways they have found a balance between the many goals that make their work unique. The novice potter begins a career by learning to center clay not only through strength, but also through skill. Then from that point on, every pot begins as a mound of centered clay spinning easily on the wheel, waiting to take shape. While throwing, the potter must maintain

that center from start to finish, or the pot will become distorted and might collapse. Between their many roles—apprentice, production potter, studio potter, and crafts demonstrator—the SDC potters have found the center, negotiating between sometimes disparate goals to find compromises that allow one role to aid the others.

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